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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"WHO ARE YOU THAT YOU SHOULD TREAD ME UNDERFOOT!" SAID HESTER.

## THE PLOT THAT FAILED.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

"I love him;  
And that's the heaviest link of the long chain—  
To love whom we esteem not."—BYRON.

Her face gleamed out through the darkness, gray and cold as if carved in stone.

The lips were set in a straight, hard line, indicative of bitter pain and suppressed pride; only her deep and luminous eyes burned with strange and passionate fire.

The man beside her dared not look into them for dread of what he should read there. She leaned on the stonework of the bridge, and looked down into the water below. Then said, in slow, cold tones—

"It is time we said good-bye."

Hiram Lonsdale started at the sound of the changed voice.

"How quickly this hour has gone!" he said, and glanced covertly at her.

"Quickly!" the girl echoed. "To me it has seemed an eternity."

"Then already my society has grown distasteful to you?"

She confronted him with a flash of anger in her manner.

"You are forgetting your part," she said, with ill-suppressed scorn and anguish. "Do you forget our agreement! From to-night we are strangers; from this hour we cast aside all old familiarity, all—all friendship." She had almost said "love."

"You go your way and I go mine; and the world being large, we shall scarcely meet again."

"And yet," he urged, "the past was pleasant. Winifred, I should be glad to think I have not hurt you much."

"You have not hurt me," she answered, steadily. "You wounded my vanity, nothing more."

But in her heart she was crying—

"Oh, how shall I bear it! How shall I say good-bye?"

But Hiram Lonsdale was happily ignorant of her anguish, perhaps more than a little hurt to believe she had never loved him; and it was with no inconsiderable accession of coldness that he offered her his hand.

"I am glad that I have wrought you so little mischief, Winifred. As for me—well, as for me, life will be harder for having known you. I have been—I am dishonourable—but, upon my soul, I love you!"

She lifted her heavy, sad eyes to his.

"I wonder if you know the meaning of love," she said, with a little bitter smile. "I am tempted to think you don't. Well, good-bye, and I hope—yes, despite my wounded vanity—I hope you will be happy."

"Thank you for your good wishes, although there is small chance of their ever being fulfilled. And will you not tell me where you are going—what you intend doing?"

"No; it is sufficient for you to know that I have found an honourable way of earning my bread. From to-night, you see, we are strangers."

And she made as though she would leave him; but he caught her hands, and held them fast.

"I wish I could feel sure you do not hate me. Winifred, there have been times when I dared believe you loved me."

"To believe that has been an insult to me and to the woman you will one day call wife. I liked you—you have been a pleasant companion."

And then she paused, afraid to trust herself further.

Hiram regarded her fixedly a moment, as though seeking to find the lie to her words in her cold, grave face. Then with a sigh he dropped her hands.

"You are to be envied," he said, bitterly. "After all, I have harmed myself most, and I am not generous enough to be glad that you are untouched."

"That is man-like," she answered, "and so I will not blame you." A slow, cold smile broke the line of her lips. "It is late and cold. I must be going home."

Then her fingers touched his a moment, her soft voice said good-bye, and he stood to watch her as she crossed the bridge and was lost in the darkness.

Winifred Caldecot walked rapidly along the lane leading from the bridge to the Rectory, looming large and grey through the mist; through the quiet gardens, which to-morrow she would leave behind, and then in the ivied porch a matronly woman met her with some suspicion of anxiety in her keen, kindly eyes.

"Miss Winifred, dear, is it safe to wander about alone, and so late?"

The girl passed into the nearest room, and sank into a chair before she answered. Then she said, with a little bitter laugh—

"Oh, no one would harm me! I am too insignificant to incur any danger."

She tossed aside her hat, and sat looking drearily into the fire, so young, so slender, so apparently helpless that the waterer's eyes filled with tears of pity and affection.

"Ah, Miss Winifred, I did hope Mr. Lonsdale was your own sweetheart, and would have helped you now in your trouble."

"We were friends only, Wilkins. Did you not know he is an engaged man?"

And the white lips did not quiver, the pale face did not lose one whit of its calmness.

The elder woman was puzzled.

"All the village joined your names," she said nervously; "and even poor dear master seemed to think he meant to take you away."

"I scarcely thought you would listen to village gossip. Oh, I did not mean to pain you! but my trouble is making me hard and bitter. Will you give me a candle, please? I want to say good-bye to-night to all the old rooms. To-morrow I shall have left them and Fenwick behind for ever."

Her voice broke then, but she quickly recovered herself, and, declining the housekeeper's company, set out on a tour through the house.

There was not a nook or cranny forgotten by her. Often she paused and leaned against a wall, with her hand pressed hard upon her breast, as one in mortal pain.

Often a low sob broke from her white and quivering lips, for was she not saying good-bye to the only home she had ever known—the home which had sheltered her and her dear dead father for nineteen years of unalloyed happiness?

They had always been poor, for Mr. Caldecot was only curate-in-charge; the vicar, who drew the large salary, rarely visited Fenwick, and had been heard to declare it was "a beastly hole."

He preached four times a year, and on these occasions all Fenwick turned out to see the "parson who was most a stranger to 'um."

Winifred came at last to a room, before which she paused a moment whilst a host of bitter and sweet memories came crowding thick and fast

upon her, only to torture anew the poor bleeding heart.

Then she entered, and, closing the door, went forward and knelt in a sudden abandonment of woe beside the bed, where a few short hours ago that silent, motionless figure lay.

To-day they had borne him, feet foremost, through the door, up the little path leading to the quiet churchyard that he had trodden so often; and then the girl burst into a bitter cry of—

"Oh, father! father! why did you leave me lonely! Come back, oh, my darling! come back to your little girl!"

There was no answer to the passionate appeal, no tender hand to clasp hers that strayed over the coverlet, as if seeking for a touch, be it ever so light, to ease the aching of her heart.

And she fell to thinking what a change one week had made in her life. Just seven days ago she had risen confident and glad in Hiram Lonsdale's love; she had gone to meet him with light step and lighter heart.

He had news for her, he said, and she listened, anticipating some pleasant surprise; but he added, hurriedly, that he was going away, and before she had recovered from the shock of his communication, he went on to say that the lady he was engaged to had remonstrated with him on his long absence, and he must return to her at once.

White to the lips Winifred had listened, vainly striving to bring back the colour to her face, the light to her eyes.

He could not see how she looked, for she kept her head steadily averted, and uttered neither exclamation nor reproach.

Suddenly he caught her hands in his, and constrained her to look at him.

"Winifred," he entreated, "speak to me!" and whilst she stood gazing into the eyes she had believed so true, he told her how his engagement had come about.

He had never loved the lady, but she was young, beautiful, rich, and he was ambitious. Her friends were influential, and he needed their assistance.

Then Winifred spoke quietly, wishing him happiness in a careless tone that almost deceived him.

Well, it was best she should be indifferent to him, as they could never marry; but he was disappointed, wounded. True, he had never told her he loved her, but his looks, his very merest actions, had been more eloquent than words.

Alas! alas! for the curate's daughter; he had won her heart and dared not claim it.

As one in a dreadful dream she went home, believing, as the very young do, that her lot was the hardest under the sun, that no further ill could befall her, that surely she must die of her love and shame!

On the threshold Wilkins met her.

"You have walked too far," she said, gently, and her face was very grave. "Come in now, and take off your wraps. Mr. Caldecot is asking for you."

"Where is he?" she answered, in a dull, mechanical way.

"In his room. Don't be frightened, Miss Winifred, but the doctor is with him. He has been taken suddenly ill."

Without a word the daughter went upstairs. A bright fire was burning in her father's room, and Dr. Hall was still with him. She went forward.

"Dear father," she said, in an awed and tremulous voice, for she had never seen him ill.

He raised his eyes to her changed, white face, and clasped her hand close, whilst Dr. Hall said—

"You must not be frightened, Miss Caldecot, when I tell you your father's cold has developed into bronchitis. With your nursing and my physic he will soon be about again."

Alas! alas! for the helpless girl! Alan Caldecot never left his bed again. Before three days had passed he was called to the long, long rest that knows no earthly waking; and Winifred, the pride of his heart, the light of his home, was alone in the world, friendless, penniless, forsaken.

As she knelt by his bed and thought of the

past she grew quieter. Her face was white and awed, as the face of one who has suddenly looked on death; her lips were set in a straight, hard line, and in her great, grey eyes was such a look of anguish as well might touch the hardest heart.

She rose at last, slowly and heavily, as though her young, strong limbs were heavy with much walking; and casting a comprehensive glance of farewell round, went to her own chamber, there to spend the long, long hours of darkness in a vain struggle with her woe.

To-night she had bidden her lover good-bye, to-night she had put behind her all the fair years of her life, all good and glad things; now she must set her face resolutely towards the dreary future.

"I shall never be happy again," she moaned, "never any more! Hiram! oh, Hiram! how could you find it in your heart so to hurt me?"

And then she hated herself because she could think of him, when the ground lay cold and damp over the dear dead body of the tenderest father a girl ever had.

Morning came at last, cold and grey. Winifred rose hastily, for there was little time to lose, and dressing herself with chill fingers went down to drink a cup of hot coffee. Then she bade good-bye to the domestics, with the exception of Wilkins, who accompanied her to the station, and despatched her with tears and blessings.

It was a long journey from Fenwick to Laureton, and it was getting quite dark when Winifred stepped out upon the little platform. A man in livery accosted her at once.

"If you please, miss, are you the new secretary?" and being answered in the affirmative, he led the way to a beautifully-appointed carriage, and mounting the box, proceeded to turn the horses' heads homewards.

It was not very long before a long, low house of grey stone loomed out through the gathering night. Lights flashed from every window, for the blinds were all up. There was a pleasant stir about the place, which seemed strange to Winifred, coming as she did from the house of death and mourning.

A maid met her in the hall—a pleasant, kindly-looking girl.

"Mrs. Firman has sent me to show you your room," she said, casting a sympathetic glance at Winifred's mourning dress. "I am afraid, miss, you must be very tired!"

"Indeed I am. Must I appear downstairs to-night?" as she toiled wearily after her.

"I think you'd best, miss. The mistress is very queer, and never excuses what she thinks our duty; but her heart isn't bad, as some of us know by experience. This is your room, miss. You see mistress had a fire lit, thinking you'd be cold. Dinner at seven, miss; the gong will soon sound."

Left to herself Winifred cast a critical glance round. The room was dainty in its appointments, the paper and hangings being sea-green; heavy beams stretched across the ceiling, giving it a quaint, old-fashioned appearance. In one corner stood a davenport, in another a large easy-chair, and the walls were adorned with a few choice engravings.

"Evidently," thought the girl, as she warmed her hands at the fire, "my comfort has been studied. Oh! I hope and pray I may suit Mrs. Firman; if not—well, I must starve."

Then she took off hat and wraps, and smoothing her hair sat down on the bedside waiting for the gong to sound. She had not long to listen for it, and with a heart beating fast and painfully against her bodice she went down to meet her future mistress.

A tall, spare woman rose as she entered the drawing-room, a woman with a hard, keen face, furrowed by time and grief, whose grey eyes took in at one swift glance every detail of the girl's dress and appearance.

"I am pleased to see you, Miss Caldecot," she said, in a low, but rather hard voice. "I really need your assistance greatly. I hope you have found your room comfortable?"

"Very, thank you. I trust I shall be able to fill the post of secretary to your satisfaction; but I have had no experience."

"I do not think experience necessary; your services are not very onerous or very numerous." At this moment the door opened and a young lady entered. She was dark as a gipsy, beautiful as a dream, and her dress was well adapted to heighten her charms.

"Isabel," said Mrs. Firman, "this is Miss Caldecot; my niece, Miss Firman."

Miss Firman glanced with haughty indifference at the little black-clad figure, the pale, sad face, and deep, serious eyes; then said, as though speaking of someone absent—

"She looks somewhat delicate," and passing out of the room, added, "Suppose we go to dinner!" and herself led the way.

All through the meal she talked on fashionable topics to her aunt, to the utter exclusion of Winifred, whose pale face had flashed almost into prettiness with indignation at the treatment to which Miss Firman subjected her.

In the drawing-room things were no better. Winifred was asked to play; she glanced deprecatingly at the elder lady.

"I am a poor pianist," she said, timidly. "I have never had any lessons save those my father gave me."

Isabel turned her haughty eyes upon her.

"Can you sing?"

"A little," answered Winifred, shortly.

"Perhaps Miss Caldecot is tired," Mrs. Firman said, not unkindly. "If you choose to go to your room do so. To-morrow, perhaps you will be sufficiently rested to amuse us."

"To-morrow he will be here," interposed her niece, quickly; and of course we shall dine *en famille*, aunt!"

"So long as Miss Caldecot remains with me she is one of the family," Mrs. Firman said, rebukefully.

Then with a terse good-night she dismissed her secretary, who stole to her room, there to "weep, and weep, and weep," as if her heart would break.

## CHAPTER II.

"Bending on him eyes  
Which needed not an empire to persuade,  
Looked into his far love, where none replied,"  
—BYRON.

"You will answer this batch of letters for me before luncheon, Miss Caldecot!" said Mrs. Firman, entering the study equipped for driving. "I am quite unable to attend to any business to-day, as I have to drive my niece to Tarlton. You will lunch by yourself, as we shall not return until evening, when we shall bring our long-expectated visitor."

Winifred knew she referred to Isabel's lover, and her heart ached with envy at this other girl's good fortune; she was rich, young, lovely and beloved. But she merely drew the batch of letters towards her, and prepared to go through them. Mrs. Firman looked over her as she wrote, and said, in her quick, sharp tones—

"You write a very legible hand, and there is plenty of character in it. Do you suppose you could revise some printer's proofs for me—shall you have time?"

"Oh, yes."

"The subject of my articles should have some interest for every true woman. I preach the supremacy of the sex."

Winifred did not feel interested, although she tried to appear so, and the lady went on—

"Perhaps you have never considered the matter?"

"No," murmured the young secretary.

"But surely you acknowledge women have rights! Well, then, what are they?"

"Heaven and home," Winifred answered, flushing hotly.

Mrs. Firman regarded her a moment with not ill-natured contempt; then, breaking into a short laugh, said—

"Ah! I shall have to convert you to my belief. But, really, I wish Mr. Lonsdale could have heard your reply—it would have pleased him. Did I tell you Isabel's lover is named Hiram Lonsdale? Good gracious! how white you are! I hope you are not delicate."

"Oh, no—no!" in a hasty, tremulous way; "it was merely a sudden pain here," laying her hand upon her side. "It is gone now," and the poor, pale lips smiled faintly.

Mrs. Firman took up her gloves, and, with an abrupt good-morning, left the study. She was a suspicious woman by nature, and Winifred's explanation of her sudden pallor did not satisfy her. As she stood at the foot of the stairs, waiting for Isabel, a flash of triumph lit up her steely grey eyes.

"I have it at last!" she thought. "Why Miss Caldecot is a native of the very place Hiram has often visited—curious! I did not notice it before. Darnfield is only three miles from Fenwick, and doubtless he often walked over; it was at the mention of his name she grew pale. How Isabel would rave if she guessed he had been indulging in incipient flirtation!"

The swish of skirts upon the stairs roused her from her reverie.

Isabel came down slowly and languidly (she rather affected languorous ways), looking very lovely in her tailor-made costume of dark cloth.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting long, auntie!"

"Not longer than usual. Dear me, child, what a curious animal you look," with a glance at her attire.

"Thank you, auntie!" with an increase of colour. "It is natural for a woman of my age to dress fashionably; with you it is a different matter."

"Oh yes," tartly. "I suppose you think it high time I took up my abode in the Firman vault; but I assure you, my dear, I haven't the least intention of doing so for another ten years. Why, Ball, you will be growing old by that time! Probably you will be all wrinkled and sallow—dark women are hideous in old age," and then Mrs. Firman laughed maliciously into her niece's face.

She was not fond of the girl, and had been very angry when she found herself appointed her guardian, as she said, "with or without my consent," and added, "the Firmans always had an amount of audacity exceeding that of any family she knew."

But having administered a wholesome rebuke to Isabel she recovered her usual abrupt good-nature, and talked gaily and well during the drive to Tarlton, where they intended purchasing a part of the wedding trousseau.

"You must get your shopping over by five," she said, as they entered the little town, "or we shall be too late to meet Hiram. He is due at Laureston at 5.55, and as he comes by express he is likely to be punctual."

The girl's face flushed, and a softer look stole into her eyes.

"I believe she loves him better than herself," thought Mrs. Firman, "and to me it is pretty evident that he will marry her to advance his interests. What fools women are!"

"What are you thinking, auntie! You look as grave as a saint. Doesn't your last article against 'our natural foes' please you?"

"No; it isn't half severe enough. I wonder what the world would be without men?"

"Oh! don't suggest such an awful state of affairs! I should be one of the first to exclaim with Cleopatra—

'There are no men to govern in this world;  
That makes my only woe.'

and I am quite sure you would join me in my lament."

"Not I. The single state is the only happy one for women."

"Then why did you marry? You could not always have been a man-hater."

"I was a foolish girl once," with a sudden lowering of her brows; "if I had not been I should never have married a Firman. They are all bad, root and branch."

"Thank you, auntie! I am not aware I have given evidence of any special vice."

"It's never too late to mend," with grim humour; and then turned with characteristic abruptness to another subject.

At last the shopping was finished, and the horses were trotting briskly towards Laureston.

Isabel's heart beat faster than she would have cared to own, she was literally giddy and faint with anticipation of her meeting with her lover. With all the force of an ill-controlled, obstinate nature she worshipped him, and would allow no obstacle to come between her and her love. She had some capacity for good, and great possibilities of evil in her composition; only the man she loved could mould her into anything approaching perfection—and alas! for Isabel, she was but a beautiful woman to him, no more. He never longed for her presence, the touch of her hand, the sound of her voice; if she frowned or smiled it was a matter of indifference to him. She was not the type of woman he would have chosen if love and ambition could go hand in hand, and he looked forward to long years spent with her almost with disgust.

But, when he sprang upon the platform, Isabel read nothing of this in his face. There was the old cold approval of her beauty in his eyes, the old calmness of greeting, and her heart cried out for so much more.

"So you've come at last," Mrs. Firman said, brusquely. "In my young days men were rarely laggards in love. Pray what have you done these past three months? No good, I dare say."

Hiram smiled coldly.

"I have made some very influential friends, and I think I shall carry the county in the coming election. The Liberal element is in the ascendant."

"Oh, don't talk of your party to me—I hate it!" snapped the lady, and her hearers broke into laughter over her acerbity.

At last the house came in view.

"This looks homelike," said Hiram; and under cover of darkness Isabel slid her hand in his.

The lamps flashed full upon their faces, and showed them with cruel distinctness to a weary watcher at a window. But no one heeded the little dark figure, no one saw the wild anguish in the lovely grey eyes, or heard the broken voice murmuring,—

"How shall I meet him? Oh, dear Heaven! how shall I meet him!"

Winifred dressed slowly; there was small need for haste. Below she heard the ripple of light and joyous laughter, the babble of high-bred voices, and she wondered in a vague, painful way what was her sin that she should be so sorely punished.

"Is the world so narrow that I must meet Hiram at every turn?" she said, drearily. "Was my lot not cruel enough before? Oh! to see her happiness; to eat the bread of service here! Could anything be more bitter!"

Should she go down! At first her heart said no, then she laughed, miserably,—

"I am a mere hired machine. I must have no will, no whims. I am my employer's property so long as I eat her bread and take her wage! Oh, my father! oh, my father! can you see your daughter now?" and she burst into a paroxysm of tears.

But she did not long indulge her woe; she must not go down with heavy eyes and tear-swollen face. No one must guess her story, least of all the woman who was his *fiancée*.

She had a part to play, and she would play it even if her heart broke with the struggle. She wondered how Hiram would meet her, and wished she could apprise him of her presence.

"If only I had told him all before we parted, this meeting would never have been. Now one false step may ruin me and drive me out into the world again—friendless, and almost penniless."

Someone knocked at the door, and in answer to her "come in" a tall, dark girl entered.

She was handsome in a fierce, gipsy-like way, and, strangely enough, bore a startling, if somewhat coarse, likeness to Isabel, whose maid she was.

She was carrying a basket of white flowers, and she now stepped forward, almost timidly, and said, in a sweet voice,—

"I thought, Miss Caldecot, these would brighten your dress a little. I hope you are not offended at the liberty I have taken!"

The orphan's pale, sensitive face flushed, and her lip quivered.

"Your kindness does me good," she said. "I was feeling so friendless and—miserable," and she would have taken Hester Bond's hand in hers, but the latter drew back with a repellant gesture.

"Don't!" she said, quickly and harshly. "You're a lady, and I'm a poor wretch of whom you know nothing. Perhaps if you knew my story you wouldn't take my flowers."

"Indeed I should, for I am sure your heart is kind."

"You are good to say so, miss, but even your goodness wouldn't stand such a test as I could put it to. Hark! that is her bell; I must go. But don't be afraid to wear the flowers; the Rector's gardener gave them to me, and I thought of you at once."

And then, without a word, she went out, closing the door behind her.

Winifred fastened some of the flowers at her breast and waist, and, placing the others in water, went downstairs.

Early as she was someone was in the drawing-room before her. Her heart leaped tumultuously against her side as a man rose from a chair to greet her.

In the dim light neither could see the other's face, but Hiram knew by the height and figure this could not be Isabel.

"I beg your pardon," he said, quickly; "I thought you were Miss Firman. Shall I ring for lights?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Lonsdale," and strained and hoarse as the girl's voice was, he recognised it.

"Come nearer; let me see you. Good Heaven, can you be Winifred?" and he drew her unresistingly to the window.

"I am Winifred Caldecot," she said, and now she had grown calmer. "Your memory is less retentive than I thought possible. It is only three days since we met, and you have forgotten me."

"I have not forgotten you," he answered, swift pain and reproach in his tone. "But how could I think I should find you a guest here—her companion?"

"You are mistaken, Mr. Lonsdale. I am not a guest, but a paid servant; I eat the bitter bread of dependence; to me, as to Dante in the old, old times, it seems, 'less corn than tears.'"

She was so changed in manner and speech that she seemed hardly to bear any likeness to the girl whose dark life he had made darker.

How his heart smote him for the part he had played towards her! How madly he longed for freedom that he might woo her once again, casting his fatal ambition behind!

Oh! to live in the clear light of her love, to sun himself in her smile! With a start he recalled himself to the present moment.

"What place do you fill here, and are they kind to you?"

"I am Mrs. Firman's secretary; she is not unkind."

"To my mind she is a dreadful woman. Don't let her inoculate you with her ideas, Winifred."

He leaned a little nearer then.

"Be kind to me?" he pleaded, with dangerous tenderness. "Believe me if I could undo the past I would. Oh! child! child! what a mistake I have made of my life!"

"I must refuse to listen to such language from you," she said, doing violence to her own heart. "If you have any honour, any compassion for my friendless state, any manliness, you will not persecute me."

Here a servant entered with lights, and before Hiram could make any further appeal Mrs. Firman appeared.

She glanced quickly from Winifred's white, calm face and proud eyes, to Hiram, who was visibly agitated. The girl broke the awkward silence.

"Mr. Lonsdale and I prove to be old acquaintances," she said, quietly.

"Humph! that accounts for his otherwise curious agitation. May I ask, Hiram, if you know anything of Miss Caldecot's movements?"

"On my honour no," he answered, hotly.

"You seem suspicious, Mrs. Firman, and you are certainly so without cause. There is small wonder that I showed surprise (which you are pleased to call agitation) at meeting Miss Caldecot here, and as a dependent."

"Don't lose your temper, it is impolitic and unmannerly. Ah! here is Isabel. My dear, how well you look!"

The girl glanced at her lover to see if he endorsed Mrs. Firman's opinion, but he appeared absent and gloomy. She slipped her hand into his arm.

"Hiram, I chose my dress to please you," with a tender stress upon the pronoun.

"It is pretty," he answered, mechanically, and scarcely vouchsafed her a look.

After dinner it was the same. Isabel strove to amuse him in sundry ways, but failed ignominiously. He hardly listened to her songs, he scarcely thanked her for them.

But when Winifred sang it was otherwise, although her voice was less powerful than sweet, and lacked cultivation. The song she chose was a simple one, but all his heart was in his eyes as he listened, and Isabel, watching, grew sick with jealousy, and an undefined dread Winifred lingered with unconscious tenderness upon the last verse:—

"How may I when he shall ask,  
Tell him who lies there?  
Nay, but leave my face unveiled  
And unbound my hair."

"Can you say to me some word  
I shall say to him?  
Say I'm looking in his eyes  
Though my eyes are dim."

Isabel rose.

"Come with me to the conservatory," she said, hurriedly, and he followed her unwillingly. Amongst the flowers and ferns she threw her arms about him, crying, "Hiram, Hiram! have you no word of love for me?"

### CHAPTER III.

"Still silent. Can no art  
Of love's, then, move thy pity? Nay,  
To thee let nothing come that owns his sway;  
Let happy lovers have no part  
With thee; nor even so sad and poor a heart  
As thou hast spared to-day."—ROBERT B. HARRIS.

He was vexed and grieved too, and would have given a great deal to be able to say he returned her passion. He had been less than man not to pity her evident love and anguish.

"Of what do you complain, Isabel?" he asked. "Don't you know I am not at all a demonstrative fellow?"

"But surely, when we are alone, you need not keep such strict control over features and words!" she answered, impetuously. "Oh, love! oh, my dear love! I am sick with a fear that I am less to you now than ever I was before!"

He stirred impatiently, not knowing what answer to make, and after a moment she went on—

"Why is it you are so indifferent to me?"

"My dear Isabel, did I ever profess any violent attachment to you? Was love included in our marriage contract?"

She shivered, and clung about him desperately. "Surely I should be more to you than any other woman?"

"You will be my wife," he answered, more gently than he had hitherto spoken.

"And some other will be your love!" she cried, passionately. "What a proud and happy woman I should be!"

"If you are dissatisfied say so now. It is not too late for us to break our contract."

He spoke eagerly, and she regarded him with suspicion.

"You have met a girl you can love better than me!" and her voice was shrill with anguish. "Your long absence is explained now! Oh! rocking herself to and fro, 'how false men are! And now what comfort will you offer me! Will you give me back my heart, free, untouched by love or woo! What equivalent will you offer for my outraged pride!'"

"Isabel," the young man answered, with some self-scorn and much pity for her, "upon my honour I meant you no wrong. I did not even guess I loved her until my whole life seemed suddenly wasted because she could be nothing to me. Dear, I will be frank."

"Because deceit is beyond you now!" bitterly.

He passed by her sneer, knowing how sorely he had wounded her.

"Isabel, I did not think you would care so much. I thought sometimes of asking for my freedom, because I saw, and still see clearly, our union could not be a happy one; but it was difficult to tell you this, pride and honour alike forbade it. But—you have breached the subject—you have openly complained of my coldness. Will you set me free?"

"And if I did," Isabel said, with averted face, "you would go to my rival and plead your cause without delay. This is what I am to suppose!"

"In justice to her, yes."

"Does she guess you love her?" and from her tone he thought she was relenting.

"I have told her that I do. I fully explained my position to her."

"And could she advance your welfare as I would? Would she hold her own against society even at fearful odds?"

"I think not; she is timid and retiring."

Hiram answered,

"But she should be high-born and wealthy to counterbalance these defects."

"She is neither."

"Then she is more beautiful than I!"

"She is lovely only in my eyes."

Isabel leaned nearer to him.

"Go to her and say—"

"That I am free to offer her marriage," he interrupted. "Thank you a thousand times, Isabel; and I hope to Heaven you will forget me and marry some worthier fellow."

"You are too impatient," with a peculiar smile. "Hear me out. Go to this girl, who is neither your equal nor beautiful, and say I know your mutual love (for of course she returns your passion), that I rejoice that you have won another heart; that I wish you both the same measure of happiness that you have given me; that as my heart aches, so yours shall ache; that your souls shall be sick with longing, as mine is sick, because now and always I hold you to your word; that I will be your wife even though you hate me!"

Her passionate voice had risen almost to a scream, and her lovely face was distorted with rage and anguish.

Hiram fell back a pace from her, and regarded her with such scorn, such bitter disappointment, that it recalled her in a measure to herself.

Suddenly she clung about him, with tender hands, and uplifted, supplicating eyes.

"Oh, I am mad so to anger and disgust you, but I am so miserable—so miserable, that even you should pity me and forgive! Think of the long months in which I have dreamed of our future, in which I learned to love you more and more truly with each passing day. Oh, my darling, this so-called passion is so avanescent (it must be), seeing the girl has so little to recommend her to you. I can give you so much. I will be your wife, your companion, your slave! You shall not leave me. I cannot be generous in this thing for my love is my life."

He unclasped the clinging fingers.

"I am answered fully," he said, in a dull, cold voice. "You shall have your own way; but if in the future I fall to make you happy, if I am less devoted, less tender than other husbands, remember you forced this thing upon me. Now, if you please, we will return to the drawing-room."

Without a word she laid her hand upon his arm, and suffered him to lead her back.

Mrs. Firman glanced curiously at them, but made no comment, and Isabel sank into a low chair, screening her face with her fan, whilst Hiram played snatches of sonatas and marches until the candles were brought in.

The lovers were left to say their "good-night" alone, and Isabel looked deprecatingly into the

dark, proud face as she lifted her own for a last kiss.

"Hiram," she whispered, with her arms about his neck, "you will not refuse me one kind word! And, dear, you will forget her now you are absent from her."

"I shall do my duty in all things towards you. Good night."

She went upstairs heavily, her face white and drawn, a great passion of hate in her eyes for her unknown rival.

In her boudoir she found Hester waiting her, according to custom; but she turned on the girl fiercely.

"What are you doing here! How dare you enter my apartments in my absence!"

Hester drew herself to her extreme height, and confronted her with scorn equal to her own, and a wild defiance that made her beauty almost diabolical. So they stood a moment face to face, mistress and maid, then Hester's arms fell to her side, and her head drooped.

"I am bound hand and foot," she said, sullenly. "I can neither go away nor resent your insolence. I wish to Heaven I were dead! I wish with all my soul you could feel what pain you make me bear. Who are you that you should tread me underfoot!"

Isabel laughed, and blazed out a word that should hardly pass the lips of a woman. Hester covered under it, and grew ghastly, but said—

"I am what you would have been in like circumstances," and before she had finished speaking Isabel struck her smartly across the cheek.

Just a moment the maid's hand was uplifted, just a moment there was murder in her heart; then she turned and fled, as though afraid of her own wild passion.

In the corridor she met Winifred (who had been to fetch a book from the library), and would have passed her, but that the young girl caught her by the skirts, and held her fast.

"Hester, what has happened! Are you in trouble! Come into my room, and let me see if I can help you. Poor girl! how toy could you are!"

Winifred drew her in, and forced her into a chair beside the fire, and stood looking down at her so compassionately, so tenderly, that the wild heart was touched, and unwonted tears stole into the black eyes.

"Do you see this!" she questioned, pointing to the mark upon her cheek. "She did that!"

"Who! Not Miss Firman! Surely she would not so far forget herself, or what is due to you?"

Hester laughed bitterly.

"Would she not! She has struck me again and again; she heaps insults on me every hour of the day; she treats me worse than she would a stray cat, and I am tied hand and foot. If I leave here I starve, or go to the bad utterly. She would take care no other lady employed me. Oh, Miss Caldecot, I hate her! I hate her! I would give all my life to come to know her pride was brought low!—that she had to lick the dust!"

"Hush! hush!" for the woman's passion was awful to witness. "Try to think less of your wrongs, Hester; and, if it is any help to you, tell me all your story."

Her soft hands were laid gently upon the other's bowed, dark head. The gray eyes had lost all look of pride or resentment, and were almost divine in their pity.

"You're the first creature that's spoken kindly to me since I came into this house," Hester said, brokenly. "Somehow the servants believe my story to be queer, and don't like me. They know I've no home and no friends, and seeing how she treats me, think they've a license to do the same."

"Poor girl! poor girl!"

"Your voice is like an angel's. I dare not look into your face; but you are so good that I'll not deceive you about my past; I'll tell you all, even though you turn from me the next moment."

Winifred still stood by her; but now her hands were pressed reassuringly upon her shoulders; and, lifting her head a little, Hester

stared into the glowing fire with mournfullest eyes.

"She—my—mistress—has a cruel power over me, and does not mind using it. If I complain she reminds me from what a life she rescued me; taunts me with the misery and shame that have burned so deeply into my heart, that I think all who look at me must read in my face."

"Even the honest love of a man who would marry me is made an instrument of torture to me."

"I must seem hard to him to hide how much he is to me. I dare not take his name whilst he is ignorant of my past, and I dare not tell him lest I should see his face change, and grow hard with loathing and scorn."

"She knows this, and taunts me with it. Oh, Heaven! Oh, Heaven! Do you not guess! Let me hide myself from your eyes! I am that unclean creature whom all good women shun—an unfortunate!"

She slid from her chair and crouched down at Winifred's feet, her face hidden, her black hair streaming about her shoulders, whilst her whole frame was shaken with half-suppressed sobs.

"Go away!" she said, "go away! Shrink from me as other women have done! Fear to breathe the air I breathe! Oh, you will never speak kindly to me any more!"

Then—oh, the wonder and the gladness of it!—Winifred's head fell about her neck, Winifred's voice whispered—

"Oh, you poor girl!—you poor girl! I can only pity you!"

Hester lifted her eyes, and she saw no change in the face above, unless, indeed, it had taken a deeper shade of tenderness; and, catching the hem of Winifred's skirt, she kissed it again and again, as though she felt herself unworthy to touch her.

Then she knew that the girl was sitting on the floor beside her, and holding her hands.

"Finish your story, Hester."

"I will, I will! Oh, if you are not afraid to touch me, there must be some hope for me."

"Miss Caldecot, I never knew any good in all my childhood; I heard nothing but oaths and obscene language; I was a gutter child, and my mother was an unfortunate. I hardly could distinguish between right and wrong."

"What wonder that I grew up turbulent and bold!"

"Unluckily for me I was a handsome girl, and—oh, the shame of it! the shame of it!—my mother forced me to tread in her own steps!"

"I hated the life; something in me cried out against it, and one night, in a fit of despair, I tried to drown myself; but I was saved by a clergyman, who carried me to a home for wretches like myself."

"Oh, you can't tell how glad I was to hide away from old companions, old scenes! They were good—most good—to me at the Home; taught me all useful things; to read and write; and I showed such skill in needlework that they talked of getting me a place in some quiet home as needlewoman."

"One day the clergyman—Mr. Malvern—brought some ladies to see the institution, and amongst them Miss Firman."

"At that time she pretended to be pious—it was the fashion, for there had been a lot of revival meetings—and so she said she would give me a chance to start afresh; she would take me as her maid."

"I was glad and grateful to her, not guessing to what misery I was going. Well, she soon showed herself in her true colours. She made a boast of her charity to all her friends, but she did not tell them how I saved her twenty pounds a year—aye, and more."

"She paid me no salary, and never has done; and, as I was quick with my needle, she had me taught dressmaking. Oh, she is a hard and a close one."

"Well, the ladies whispered amongst themselves, and the maids listened, and soon, at whatever house we stayed, the girls avoided me as if I had the fever, and the men stared curiously at me."

"Many—oh, many a time!—I've been tempted to go back to the old life; I have felt that anything would be easier than to live like this; but something always held me back."

"Thank Heaven for that! Hester, who is this man who would marry you?"

"The Rector's gardener, William Hammond."

"Why not tell him all you have told me? Believe me, Hester, if he is a true man, he will pity you more than he will condemn."

"Oh, no, no! I dare not risk it. Men may fall so many times and no one thinks the worse of them; but, let a woman once slip, she is ruined for all time, no matter how sorry she may be."

Hester lifted herself wearily.

"I am going, Miss Caldecot. Thank you for your goodness—and—and may I keep this?"

She picked up a flower which had fallen from Winifred's breast.

"Miss Caldecot, I'm not all bad!" pathetically; "but if ever a chance comes to pay back Miss Firman all I owe her I will."

Her features and voice changed again. Once more she was the revengeful woman.

"I will make her regret her conduct to the day of her death!"

And Winifred, seeing it was vain to expostulate with her in her present mood, let her go unrebuked.

In the morning when she entered the study she found Mrs. Firman already there.

"You are late, Miss Caldecot. Please remember I consider punctuality a cardinal virtue."

No answer. Both ladies wrote on awhile in silence; but suddenly the elder said, abruptly—

"What do you know of Hiram Lonsdale?"

Winifred, startled and pale, answered hurriedly—

"We were very well acquainted before my father's death."

"There was never a flirtation between you?"

With keen suspicion.

"No, madam!" with a sudden flash of anger.

"Ladies do not flirt."

"Humph! Well, take my advice, and don't presume now upon your old acquaintance with him. Isabel won't have anyone peaching on her preserves."

Silence again; but when Mrs. Firman rose and left the room the girl flung her arms out wide before her, and, burying her face upon them, sobbed as if her heart would break.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"Now by the joy that was and grief that is,  
By every sacred forgotten kiss,  
By all the bitterness of unshed tears,  
Help me to bear the burden of the years  
Give me fresh courage and sustain my soul."  
—MARSHTON.

The walls were glistening with holly and laurel; Christmas roses were everywhere gleaming pearly white from the midst of dark foliage. Outside the carol singers were giving a fearful rendering of "God rest ye, merry gentlemen," and in her room Miss Firman was regarding her reflection with undisguised admiration. Behind her stood Hester, holding a white, fleecy wrap ready for her mistress's shoulders.

"And how do I look, Hester?" asked Isabel, with unusual graciousness. "Isn't my dress a miracle of prettiness?"

"The dress is all right, miss," answered the maid, grudgingly.

"Faint praise," with a slight, scornful laugh. "Give me my cloak."

She took a farewell glance of herself, of the tall, superb figure, the glistening silken robes, whose whiteness was enhanced by the holly she wore at her breast, and the dazzling emeralds about her throat and wrists.

"Surely," she thought, "he must see to-night how beautiful I am; and he has been kinder of late. Oh! in time he will love me," and the brilliant colour flooded her face and lit up her large dark eyes.

She was in such a happy mood she could even

afford to be gracious to Winifred, and meeting her on the stairs, said,—

"You must have some flowers to brighten your dress, Miss Caldecot; ask German to cut you some."

"Thank you, but I have already received some hyacinths; I shall wear those," and she passed on to her room, where Heester was waiting for her. She it was who had brought those heavy scented, spotless blossoms for the young secretary's adornment.

Ever since that memorable night when she had told her story she had performed countless little services for Winifred that added not a little to her comfort; and now she began to plait the waving brown hair with deft, gentle fingers, and after fastening a spray of hyacinths in the heavy collar, she proceeded to weave together blossoms and maidenhair fern to be worn on the bosom of the plain black dress. When all was finished she surveyed her work with critical, but pleased eyes.

"Miss Caldecot, I didn't think you were so pretty! Oh, I do hope some of the gentlemen will be taken by you to-night. Oh! wouldn't she be mad. She hates anyone to be admired but herself, and when Mr. Lonsdale is away she flirts with the giddiest of them. I don't envy him; he doesn't look happy."

She watched Winifred go downstairs with such tenderness in her eyes that her beauty seemed transfigured, but when she entered Isabel's room, where all the fiery lay scattered about, the old defiance and bitterness returned.

"I hate her," she whispered, deep down in her heart. "One day she shall know it."

Where she sat she could hear the strains of intoxicating music; she could almost fancy she heard the rhythmic beat of feet, the low tones of high-bred voices.

She closed her eyes and conjured up the figure of the woman she so hated, radiant in silks and jewels; she saw the proud, dark face lit up with smiles; she heard voices whispering sweet flatteries to her, and suddenly she laughed aloud.

"Make hay whilst the sun shines, madam," she said, "for as surely as I have sinned and suffered I will bring you down to the dirt."

In the ball-room all was light and mirth. Winifred, sitting alone, looked on with wistful eyes. No one noticed her, no one spoke to her. It was hard to sit lonely and neglected; the blood ran so freely in her veins, she was so capable of enjoyment, despite her great and never forgotten troubles, and she loved dancing. Her little feet kept time to the enchanting strains of the music, a faint pink tinted her cheeks, and her eyes were bright.

One man glanced towards her, was he going to ask for a dance! No, he merely said to a friend,—

"Who is that nice little girl in black?"

"Oh, only Mrs. Firman's secretary. It would be hardly advisable to pay her much attention when the fair Isabel is present," and he went to seek his partner.

"May I see your programme, or don't you dance?"

The voice sent a sudden thrill through her. She started, looked up into Hiram's face with piteous, grey eyes, but she gave him her programme.

"I haven't danced yet," she said, with a nervous laugh, "because no one has asked me, and I do love waiting."

"I shall take the next then; this is half over," and then, almost before she was aware of it, his arm was about her, and they had joined the whirling throng.

How fast her heart beat! How the colour came and went over the sweet, small face! how bright her eyes had grown!

"Are you tired?" asked Hiram, almost breathlessly, and his voice unconsciously took a tenderer tone; involuntarily he held her closer.

"Tired! Oh, no! I could go on for ever! Please don't stop."

"Winifred, am I forgiven?" bending lower over the pretty head.

"Don't. You will spoil the night. Let me have one pleasant hour!"

"Poor child!" and he drew his breath hard. "Would to Heaven I could make you happy!"

"Pray be careful. I should be glad if you would speak with a little less emphasis. Miss Firman is watching us."

"I will try to obey. Oh! is it all ended? Let me take you to a seat; you must rest whilst I find you another partner."

For a short time the girl forgot everything but present enjoyment. When once the ice was broken several men asked for her programme, and declared afterwards to each other that "Miss Caldecot was out and away the best dancer in the room, and a nice little creature to boot."

Then came her waltz with Hiram, almost the last. Once again she was in his arms; once again she listened to his voice, and, mad for the moment, drank deeply of the draught of joy, heedless of what might follow.

As for him, he was carried away by his passion. He forgot Isabel and all the fealty he owed her. He forgot that he could make Winifred's life harder by his ill-concealed partiality. The scent of her fading hyacinths came sickeningly up to him, laden as it were with passion and pain.

"Winifred," he whispered, "are you happy? Has to-night been good?"

"Yes," she answered, in the same low tone, "very, very happy."

"Why?"

She hesitated, flushed, then said—

"Everyone has been kind to me, and I like dancing so much."

"Have I had nothing to do with your happiness, little one?"

"Yes," she answered, forgetful of all but her love. "Now let me go! Oh, please!" as he tried to detain her, "please do not prevent me!"

She hastened away from him and up to her room. She could dance no more; no other man should hold her in his arms.

"Oh, my love! my love!" she said; "how hard I have been to you. But I forgive you all the pain, all the shame, because you loved me then and love me still. How hard I was to you, my dear; what wicked pride I showed!"

She was very happy. She would think only of pleasant things to-night.

"To-morrow I shall have time to be sad," she whispered, "to-night I will give to love and him."

It was nearly morning when she fell asleep, and she was dreaming happily of the dear old home, and that her father was once more with her, when she was roused by a heavy hand upon her shoulder, and the broad light of a lamp falling athwart her face.

She sat up dazed and startled, to find Isabel Firman looking down on her with such hate in her eyes that she shrank back in sudden fear.

"In future, Miss Caldecot, will you be less lavish with your favours to Mr. Lonsdale? Kindly remember he is an engaged man, and there is considerable difference in your relative positions! Your conduct in an equal would have been bad form—in a dependent it was outrageous—and a repetition of it will result in your instant dismissal from my aunt's service," and before Winifred had recovered her breath she closed the door with a bang, and her footsteps were heard echoing along the corridor.

After the ball the days crept on slowly enough for Winifred; at night she wished for day, and at morning she wished for night. She fulfilled her task to Mrs. Firman's satisfaction, but she was quite well aware that both aunt and niece watched all her goings and comings—that they regarded her simplest words to Hiram with suspicion. She was certain that Isabel dogged her steps, and fiercely as she resented this surveillance she dared say nothing. She remembered bitterly she was but a dependent, and said in her sad, young heart—

"I must not quarrel with my bread."

But one day Mrs. Firman and Isabel drove to Tarterton, leaving Winifred behind to answer a pile of business letters. For a time she wrote on in silence, but at last she became aware of some other presence in the room than her own,

and, glancing up, met the passionate look of Hiram's dark eyes.

"Mr. Lonsdale," she said, half-incoherently, "you should not come here. If Mrs. Firman returns, and finds you with me, my last state will be worse than my first."

"You mean your are forbidden to exchange any words with me!"

"I mean Miss Firman is jealous of any little civility I may receive from you."

He frowned, but went a step nearer her.

"Tell me, is your life easy here, Winifred? I fancy Mrs. Firman is rather partial to you—but is Isabel pleasant?"

"I complain of nothing," Winifred answered, coldly. "I am not forgetful of my position. Oh! trust me, I shall not presume."

There was such bitterness in her voice, such pain and humiliation on her face, that Hiram was tempted to catch her to his heart, to tell her madly of his love, and implore her pardon for all past treachery; to beg her give her life into his keeping, but then came the memory of Isabel, the woman who loved him "not wisely, but too well."

Still, he took Winifred's hands in his. In his strong desire to brighten her life, to teach her her happiness, he forgot much of that coldness and constraint which had proved his safeguards.

"My dear," he said, and his rich tones were tremulous with ill-subdued passion, "my dear, can I do nothing to help you?"

"Nothing. I stand alone now and always."

"Ah! love, if you knew the shame and remorse I endure day and night, week in, week out, when I remember my conduct towards you (and when do I forget?), you would pity me despite your wrongs."

Now he had touched the right chord; that he should be unhappy and debased in his own opinion, because of her, was more than she had dreamed. She was touched and grieved beyond measure.

"You have done me no wrong," she said, gently. "Pray believe I could not reproach you if I would."

Her tearful eyes were lifted to his, her sweet lips were tremulous; in a sudden access of passion he snatched her to his heart.

"Oh! my darling, my poor little darling! what a scoundrel I have been to you!"

She forgot her pride, her assumption of indifference, as she threw her arms about his neck, and hid her face upon his breast.

"It is worth all the pain and shame to know that, after all, you loved me!" she cried. "Oh! Hiram, oh! my dear, I am a glad and proud woman to-day. See, I will hold back nothing from you now. I have often lied to you, often done my heart grievous wrong; now, because I hope and pray such a confession may in some measure console you, I say I love you, and have always loved you—that I will love you to my life's end!"

His mad kisses were upon her face and neck, and brow; his heart beat wildly under her ear; his breath came hard and fast.

"Sweetheart! sweetheart, I cannot let you go! Heaven helping me, you shall be my wife!"

"Oh! no, no! You forget Isabel. All your love and all your loyalty should be hers."

He only pressed her closer to his heart, and in utter silence she consented to his embrace. They were both blissfully unconscious of a wild, white face that looked in upon them, of eyes full of diabolical hate, of pallid lips drawn tightly back from glistening teeth in a convulsive smile of rage and scorn.

Winifred strove to free herself from Hiram's embrace.

"Let me go," she said; "I am faint and giddy. I want to be alone."

There was a faint rustle of skirts outside, but neither heard nor heeded, and Isabel sped upstairs before her rival, closing and locking her door against all intruders.

She did not see Winifred until they met in the drawing-room. The secretary's face was pale, her eyes showed signs of weeping; Isabel herself was brilliant, although the bloom upon her cheeks was dashed with strange pallor. She

leaned towards Hiram as he took her down to dinner.

"Give me five minutes alone," she said, in a whisper. "The library will be deserted—we shall not be interrupted."

He bowed his head gravely. He was rather glad than otherwise that she should seek a *tele-tete*, for he meant to tell her, come what would, he would not sacrifice his whole life and that of another to a false idea of honour.

Immediately after dinner he kept his tryst, and found Isabel already in the library. She smiled faintly as he entered, and he thought she was looking very wan; but she addressed him in a calm voice, and broached her subject without any preface.

"Hiram, I saw you with Miss Caldecot this afternoon, and now I know who has won you from me. The other day, when my pain was so fresh, I spoke cruelly and wildly; I believe I was mad. But since then I have had time for thought, and I see that a union between us could only result in misery to both, so here and now I give you your freedom. I wish you had chosen more wisely—someone who was your equal; but you know best what will satisfy you. It may be my jealous heart that compels me to think Winifred Caldecot less good and innocent than she seems. Oh! forgive me if I fall in generosity towards her, and believe that I wish you all earthly happiness."

Her voice faltered and broke then. She turned from him, sobbing aloud, and when he followed and strove to comfort her she would hear nothing that he could say.

The following morning he left Mrs. Firman's house. He was too manly to soon to urge his suit upon Winifred.

"I will wait," he said, "until Isabel has gone to her friends. I should be a brute to parade my happiness before her."

Between the two girls there was perfect silence about Hiram, but Isabel treated Winifred with a gentle deference wholly new to her; and, though she reproached herself for distrusting Isabel, the young secretary was more and more confirmed in her belief that she was playing a part.

One night, towards the close of January, Miss Firman was dressing for a dinner at Lady Holkham's. Hester had arranged and rearranged her draperies, had clasped bracelet after bracelet about her wrists, and several necklets in succession about the column-like throat, but none had found favour in her mistress's eyes. At last, with a little impatient gesture, Isabel said—

"Give me the emerald. After all, I think I will wear them."

Hester dived to the bottom of the casket, and then looked up with a startled air.

"They are not here, miss. Have you had them out?"

"No, no. They must be there. Why, I placed them with the pearls last night!" and she, too, tumbled out the contents of the casket, but nowhere could the emerald necklaces be found.

Miss Firman ran to her aunt's room, and in an incredibly short time that lady had called the servants together.

"Your keys," she said, after telling of her niece's loss. "Your boxes must be searched."

One and all delivered them up, until Mrs. Firman came to Winifred. The girl was deathly white.

"Madam, you surely will not make me suffer such an indignity! Pray remember I am a lady, and consequently above suspicion."

## CHAPTER V.

"She stood up in a bitter case,  
With a pale yet steady face,  
Like a statue thunderstruck."

—K. B. BROWNING.

MRS. FIRMAN shot one swift, suspicious glance at her, then said again—

"Your keys, Miss Caldecot."

"It is merely a matter of form," whispered Isabel, soothingly, and Winifred advancing laid her small bunch upon the table, saying—

"Understand, I do this under protest," and

her eyes flashed fire, her marble-white face flushed crimson.

The next thing was to send for a detective, and until his arrival the servants stood awed and uneasy in the presence of their mistress. Hester alone was calm and self-contained. When asked for her keys she flung them down with such insolent defiance that Isabel's face flamed with colour, but she controlled her usually bitter tongue, and satisfied herself by glancing witheringly at her maid.

At last Carter the detective arrived, and accompanied by Mrs. Firman went the round of the rooms.

To those waiting his return the time seemed an eternity. Isabel chatted easily with Winifred and speculated audibly as to who would prove the thief.

"I can't imagine," she said, "when the necklace was abstracted. I am quite certain it was in the casket last night. This is really very annoying, and I hardly care to leave home until something is known. I am afraid I must disengage Lady Holkham."

As she spoke the door opened, and Carter, followed by Mrs. Firman, entered. He was carrying the necklace, every separate stone flashing under the full blaze of light.

Mrs. Firman wore a look of mingled pity, disappointment, and contempt. She turned to the assembled servants.

"Leave the room!"

"Where is the need, aunt?" Isabel asked. "It is very evident that one of those present is guilty. Why should the thief be spared any disclosure?"

"I ask it as an especial favour, Isabel. Miss Caldecot, will you remain?"

But Isabel broke out,—

"This consideration is rather excessive, aunt; and it is but just to the innocent that the thief should be publicly exposed. I tell you candidly that he or she will meet with small mercy from me!"

Mrs. Firman glanced from her niece to Carter and back again in a deeply troubled way.

"Isabel, pray yield to my wishes."

"Not in this instance, aunt. I am of age, my own mistress, and shall therefore take the management of my affairs in my own hands. Carter, you have to sentimental scruples. In whose box did you find this?"

"In Miss Caldecot's, miss."

There was a sudden cry, but ill-suppressed from those assembled.

Hester separated herself from her companions, and advanced towards Winifred, who stood white and still, as though stricken speechless.

"Do you hear what this man says?" cried Hester. "Why do you not deny it? Say it is false—for his sake say it is false!"

At that reference to Hiram, Winifred started, quivering in every limb, scarcely capable of speech. Her pale lips refused to frame a word, until Hester repeated her entreaty.

Then steadying herself by a great effort, she said,—

"I don't know who has done me this evil turn; but as Heaven is my witness I am innocent of theft! Someone placed the necklace in my trunk during my absence this afternoon. Oh! Mrs. Firman, you must believe me!" and she clasped her hands in passion and supplication.

Mrs. Firman was more moved than she cared to show, but Isabel stepped forward.

"If this is true," in a high and haughty tone, "the matter passes entirely out of my hands. I said I would have no mercy on the thief, neither would I if it were my own sister. Carter, you know what to do."

Winifred sprang to her side.

"Oh for the love of Heaven, have this matter investigated. I don't know to what you are condemning me. I am innocent, indeed, indeed I am! Do not brand my father's name with shame; do not blight all my life! Oh, Heaven, what have I ever done to win so cruel an enemy!"

Carter looked on with a sardonic smile. He was used to such protestations, and generally the guilty were the most voluble, the most emphatic in their declarations of innocence.

He waited for instructions.

"Do your duty," Isabel said, coldly.

Then, as Carter advanced, she leaned nearer, and whispered,—

"What do you suppose he will say?"

The orphan's face was convulsed with shame and anguish, but she made no reply, neither did she offer any resistance when the officer placed the handcuffs about her wrists. It was not until Mrs. Firman said the carriage was at the door that she roused herself from her drooping position, then she lifted her head, and confronted her rival.

"You are at the bottom of this fiendish plot," she said. "What would it profit any other to wrong me thus? Who will benefit by my loss save yourself?"

The detective gave her the usual warning, but she did not seem to hear him. She glanced wildly round upon the sceptical, condemning faces, vainly seeking for pity and belief.

Suddenly her skirts were grasped tightly, and Hester's voice said,—

"It will all come right, Miss Winifred, never fear. Keep a brave heart," and then she was led away; but long before she reached the hall-door she had faltered.

Later on Isabel drove to Lady Holkham's, and there regaled the company with the story of the young secretary's crime. She was very grave and sorrowful, but said that of course she should prosecute, as vice must be suppressed.

Some ultra virtuous maroons applauded her principles, but a few said they would not care to encounter such a judge as Miss Firman, and were secretly sorry for Winifred.

At midnight Isabel was once more safe in her boudoir, with Hester wearily waiting upon her.

"This is a shocking thing about Miss Caldecot," said the young lady.

"I don't believe she did it," Hester answered, quietly. "Somehow she has made an enemy in the house, and this is a piece of revenge."

"Nonsense! all the servants profess to like her."

"Did the mistresses?" asked Hester, bluntly.

"And professions don't stand for much."

"What do you mean?" Isabel questioned, with a haughty stare.

"Precisely what I say, miss. Whoever stole the necklace it was not Miss Caldecot."

"You are very sure of her innocence. Perhaps you know more than you will tell. Upon my word I believe you have some suspicion of the (to your mind) guilty one. Was it you?" with a light, scornful laugh.

"It would be as likely that you did it as I," retorted the maid with unveiled scorn. Then advancing, "How white you are, miss! Are you ill? Shall I get you the sal volatile?"

"Do; this business has quite unnerved me. Poor, poor Mr. Lonsdale! Miss Caldecot was such a *protégée* of his. Thank you, Hester. You may go now; I am sure you must be tired."

Outside the room the maid paused.

"And very considerate you've grown, Isabel Firman; quite mild and kind. Oh, if you only knew what I knew!" and she indulged in a fit of silent but ecstatic laughter.

Hiram Lonsdale sat alone, with an open, "daily" before him. It was a brief paragraph that had attracted his attention, and, driving the blood from his face, left him white and trembling as a weak woman.

In a few sentences the story of Winifred's guilt was published to the whole world; everyone could become cognizant that she lay in the Tarlton goal awaiting her trial at the March assizes.

He had treated her badly in days gone by; he had sacrificed his heart's dear love to ambitious hopes and desires, but now in this hour of trial he was true and staunch; he had no thought but of her misery, her utter helplessness.

Not for an instant did he believe her guilty; he was as certain as Hester had been that she was the victim of some diabolical plot, and he felt it treated with him to clear her name from any aspersions.

He folded his paper, and for a few moments

studied Bradshaw intently; then he tossed a few things into a portmanteau, hailed a cab, and was driven to Liverpool-street. There he took ticket for Laureston, and was soon speeding towards his whilom *fiancé's* present home.

On reaching the house he was told that Mrs. and Miss Firman were out, but they would be home to luncheon. So he strolled into the library, where he was presently joined by Hester Bond.

"Sir," she said, respectfully, "do you come about Miss Winifred?"

He was not a sociable man, and he rather resented her question.

"My business is with your mistress."

But Hester remained, undaunted by his coldness.

"Perhaps I can tell you more than Miss Firman would or could. Will you answer me one question—do you think the young lady guilty?"

"Good Heavens, no!" startled out of his haughty calmness.

"I am glad to know that, sir; it makes matters easier. If you think she is innocent you won't mind trying to prove that she is. Lawyers are expensive, and though I should be glad to help Miss Caldecot (she was always so good to me) I've no money. But I can do more for her than any of you. Will you trust me, sir?"

The woman's manner was so earnest that it impressed him.

"What do you know?" he asked, eagerly.

"Well," she answered, "Only you may be sure of one thing—if Miss Winifred stands her trial she will be acquitted without a shadow on her name."

"You are hopeful. But tell me what grounds you have for your belief! Apparently you and I are alone in it."

Hester laughed.

"Oh! you must not try to discover my secret, but you are welcome to know I shall work for the lady, and I shall be successful. But please get a good lawyer. Mrs. Wilkins has come up from Fenwick (she was housekeeper there, you see), and has brought all her little stock of money with her; but, bless you, it's like a drop of rain to the ocean, at least where lawyers are concerned. And now I must go; it won't do for Miss Firman to see us together. But, whatever you do, don't trust that Jezebel—she hates Miss Winifred."

Before he could speak she was gone, and a few minutes later he was joined by his late *fiancée*.

"My dear Hiram," she said, with a tremor in her voice, "I am unfeignedly grieved for you. What a bird of ill omen I was when I prophesied she would bring you nothing but pain and shame!"

He would not take her hand, but, looking sternly into her eyes, said,—

"Who is the prosecutrix? Yourself or Mrs. Firman?"

"I am," and she quailed a little under his look.

"Would it not be better to let the whole case fall through?"

"Even supposing she is guilty? My dear Hiram, your principles are very lax. It is the duty of every individual to do his or her utmost to suppress crime."

"Since when have you set up such a high standard?" with a bitter sneer. "It would be more womanly to show mercy than to exact 'your pound of flesh.' And does the mere fact that the necklace was found in Miss Caldecot's trunk prove her the thief?"

"Beyond a doubt. She had not an enemy in the house."

"Are you sure of that? Where was she on the afternoon of the day on which the theft was committed?"

"I had sent her to Tarlton to match some wools. Really, Hiram, you should have been a lawyer. You seem suspicious even of me," pathetically; "but, of course, remembering your hopes concerning Miss Caldecot, I will not take offence. You will stay to luncheon, and let us talk over this sad affair dispassionately. I shall

be only too happy if you can prove her innocence."

"I can't stay, having a great deal to see to. I shall take rooms at the 'Jolly Waterman' at Tarlton."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Firman's voice behind them. "Surely you won't refuse our hospitality because of a difference of opinion! Believe me, this affair worries and grieves me not a little."

She spoke in evident good faith, and Hiram grasped her hand cordially.

"You will see for yourself how awkward my position would be if I remained here—you fighting one way, and I another."

"I beg your pardon," abruptly. "I am quiescent. It is quite against my desires that this prosecution has been undertaken. Convinced as I am of the girl's guilt, for her own sake and for yours, I would have let her go free. Come, say you will stay with us!"

"No, thank you all the same. Don't you know two cannot walk together unless they are agreed, and that we are most decidedly not. I tell you, Mrs. Firman, there has been foul play somewhere," and as he took his leave he saw that Isabel was ghastly white.

"I believe she is in the plot," so ran his thoughts. "Ay, more, she originated it!"

He drove to the Tarlton goal, and requested to see Winifred. Fortunately it was victory day, and he was admitted for a quarter of an hour.

As the cell door was opened he caught sight of Winifred sitting with head down bent, her chin drooping on her breast. She did not look up until he spoke her name, and when he saw her face his heart failed him. She looked like one who stands upon the brink of the river of death; her cheeks were fallen in, her eyes sunken, and her profile sharpened almost beyond recognition.

At sight of him she put up hands as if to ward him off.

"Oh! she cried, in a faint voice, heavy with shame and pain, 'why have you come! How could you have the heart to look on me in my degradation!'"

Then, to her amazement, her hands were taken in a strong and tender clasp, and she was drawn very, very gently into the protection of his arms. His kisses were laid upon her brow and lips, and his voice broken with love, tremulous with pity for and indignation at her wrongs, spoke such words as she had never hoped to hear again.

"My poor darling! my poor darling! I have come to fight your battle for you—to protect you against your enemies, to comfort you if I can. Sweet and dear, was all my past conduct so black that you could believe I should fail you now! I came as soon as I knew of this thing, and I shall stay here—at the 'Jolly Waterman'—until all is ended."

She half forgot her fears, her woes, as she lay in his embrace.

"Oh! my dear," she whispered, "it gives me fresh courage to have you near, to feel you have not failed me. But," with swift apprehension, "do you believe me innocent?"

"Heaven knows I do. The woman I loved, and love, could not be guilty of such a vulgar crime as they have laid to your charge."

"But if the evidence should go against me?"

she urged, brokenly.

"That cannot be," he answered, desperately.

"I will engage the best counsel the times afford. Thank Heaven! I have some means at my command."

"But supposing might not right should prevail, and—although it breaks my heart to dwell upon such a thought—I know it is possible, what will you do then?"

"Wait until you are free. Then I will make you my wife, my dear and esteemed wife."

"Oh! no, no. Not with such a stain upon my name."

"In time the stain would be wiped away. But, Winifred, have you no idea as to who is your enemy?"

She flashed poppy red.

"Will you be angry if I say I have a conviction that Miss Firman is my enemy? She never liked

me, although at the last she professed to do so. Well, on the afternoon of that dreadful day she asked me to walk here to match some wools. When I went to my trunk for my cloak there was nothing there but my own belongings. At night her necklace was found hidden between a dress and some folds of lace. Could you ascertain if the lock has been tampered with?"

"I will do so. But did you leave your keys about anywhere?"

"I remember I changed my dress for walking, and left them in the pocket of my morning-gown. Someone must have found them there."

## CHAPTER VI.

"TRUTH WILL OUT."

EVERY eye was turned upon the prisoner, who was accommodated with a chair because of her weakness.

She was worn almost to a shadow, and her heavy mourning dress hung upon her in great folds.

She looked years older than she really was. All her youth seemed to have flown, and many a woman looking on her felt her heart stir with pity.

In answer to the charge she pleaded "Not Guilty," and suddenly she stood erect, clinging to the dock for support, most pale, most piteous, yet with something in her mien that spoke of innocence.

The counsel for the defence was a young and rising man, who had a perfect belief in his client's innocence, and was eager to use all his eloquence in her behalf.

His opponent was a man who had made his mark, and was not at all likely to spare him or the prisoner.

The first witness called was Isabel, and she answered all questions carefully and well. She was perfectly calm, superbly dressed, and supremely lovely.

Men looked at her with unvelled admiration; but a few women noticed the cruel curve of her lips, and whispered amongst themselves that she would be a bitter enemy.

She said the prisoner had been a great favourite both with herself and her aunt; that all her fancies had been indulged, her comfort considered, and she had repaid their affection with basest ingratitude.

On the night previous to the robbery she had seen her emerald necklace safely locked up in her casket, and her maid had given her the key.

The following day she had occasion to send Miss Caldecot into the town, but to her knowledge, no one had entered the young lady's room.

During the morning she herself had been absent from home, and on her return had thought her bonnet looked somewhat disarranged, but had made no remark about it.

In the evening she discovered her loss and at once sent for Carter, and the missing necklace had been found in the prisoner's box.

Further inquiries elicited the fact that on examination the lock of the casket proved to be tampered, whilst that of the trunk was unimpaired.

Her evidence made a great impression, and those who had formerly believed in Winifred began to feel their faith in her shaken.

Witness after witness was called, and the case against defendant momentarily grew blacker, and poor Wilkins felt her heart grow like lead within her bosom.

Then the counsel for the defence, rose, with a certain assurance in voice and mien which carried some degree of comfort to Mrs. Wilkins, and considerably surprised the court.

He carefully examined the servants, mercilessly pounced upon Isabel, and called forth a volley of indignation by his insinuations.

But it seemed to the audience he allotted nothing of any moment, and the interest began to flag, when Hester Bond was called.

As she took up her position in the witness-box folks murmured amongst themselves how like she was to her mistress, and commented

on the ill-suppressed triumph in her eyes and voice.

Her clear tones struck the heavy air and seemed to cleave it asunder; her face grew instinct with gratified revenge and some tenderer feeling, which, perhaps, was love for Winifred.

"Do you remember the twenty-ninth of January?" asked the young counsel.

"Most decidedly; I have good reason to do so."

"What reason?"

"That I discovered a plot against Miss Caldecot. It was to take away her good name."

"Who was the originator of the plot?"

"Miss Firman. I believe she hated the prisoner because Mr. Lonsdale preferred her to herself. On the morning of the twenty-ninth I was in the little room adjoining Miss Firman's boudoir when I heard a queer noise, and looking in, saw my mistress forcing the lock of her casket with a pair of sharp-pointed scissors. I thought it was funny, as I knew she had the key in her possession."

"What did you do?"

"I continued to watch her. I was curious to see what she would do."

"What followed?"

"She tumbled out the jewels until she came to the emerald necklace, that she slipped in her pocket."

"Silence!" cried an usher, for the commotion in the court was growing extreme. The prisoner had sunk upon her chair, and sat with bowed head and covered face.

"Did you not think such an action strange?"

"I did, and determined to wait until I saw the end of it all."

"I think the defendant was sent into the town later on; is that so?"

"Yes, and when she was gone I began to guess what was going on. Miss Firman had never employed her before."

"What did you do?"

"As soon as Miss Firman went upstairs I followed her; she went straight to her boudoir and I hurried to Miss Caldecot's room. There is a great wardrobe in one corner and as it was nearly empty I hid myself there, leaving the door ajar. In a little while my mistress came in."

"You remained unobserved?"

"Yes. I saw her look all round, and catching sight of Miss Caldecot's morning gown she rifled the pocket, putting back everything but a bunch of keys. She fitted one to the trunk, and then I saw her take out the necklace and lifting up the topmost layer of clothes place it between them and some lace. Then she locked the trunk, returned the keys to the dress pocket and went out."

Such a furor of execration had seldom been heard in Tariton Hall as followed this disclosure; the prisoner alone seemed to hear nothing, heed nothing, as she sat with drooped head and tightly-clasped hands, but Hiram's face was full of passionate joy and triumph.

When silence had been obtained the cross-examination began; the counsel for the prosecution dealt unmercifully with Hester, but he was not able to shake her evidence.

"You know," he said at last, exasperated by her coolness, "you know the punishment for perjury!"

"I do; but it is not I who have to fear such punishment. I have only spoken truth."

"Why have you kept silence so long? Is it not curious you should say nothing until now?"

"No," Hester answered, a sudden expression of hate transfiguring her face. "I had a purpose. I swore to be revenged on Miss Firman, and would it have been revenge to have told what I knew until to-day? The defendant would have begged me to screen her from justice—she was always so forgiving."

"Then to get your revenge you allowed a young lady to suffer unmerited imprisonment for two months?" questioned the counsel, incredulously.

"I did; because I knew by so doing I could have two objects at once."

There was nothing further to be elicited from Hester, and she was allowed to go down, but

when Isabel reappeared Winifred's counsel treated her as unsparingly as his opponent treated her maid.

"I think the lock of your casket was found to have been tampered with!"

"It was. It appeared as though it had been forced by scissors or a knife."

"Assuming that scissors had been used to force it, will you swear you did not use them?"

Just a moment's pause, then she answered, hoarsely,—

"Of course I will."

"What motive had you for getting rid of the defendant during the hours of two and six?"

"None but those I have already stated. I wanted some wools, and I thought the walk would be good for her, as she complained of a headache."

"Why did you go into her room during her absence and rifle her pocket?"

"I—I don't understand you. I never entered her room at any time during her stay in the house," but her face had grown ashy, and her eyes wild with fear.

"You are ready to assert that you did not secrete the necklace in her trunk?"

"I—I protest against such innuendoes. I—I am ill." She threw up her hands and reeled forward, but directly afterwards steadied herself.

"You had no malice towards Miss Caldecot? You were the best of friends?"

"Always."

"And it was a part of your friendship to convict her of theft?"

"I owed it as a duty to society," she answered faintly; "in its interests I was bound to expose the criminal. I am inclined to believe now this is a case of kleptomania."

"You can go down."

The judge had summed up, the jury were asked to give their verdict, and in a breathless silence, without having retired, one and all gave the hearty response "Not Guilty," adding through the foreman, "that they believed Miss Caldecot to be the victim of a diabolical plot."

Such shouting, such huzzas as followed, such execration of Isabel, might well have deafened and confused any man within the court.

All eyes were turned upon Winifred, but she neither spoke nor lifted her head; and when Hiram, forcing his way to her, told her she was free, she made no response, and then he knew she had fainted.

He lifted her in his arms, and on either side the multitude parted in living waves to let him pass through. Mrs. Wilkins followed closely, sobbing as though her heart would break, to think of all her darling had suffered; and Mrs. Firman, ashamed of her niece, afraid of what the mob might do in its fury, escaped by a back way, dragging Isabel with her.

Winifred was still unconscious when they arrived at the "Jolly Waterman," but under the loving ministrations of the old housekeeper she quickly revived, and the first face her eyes lit upon was Hiram's, instinct with love and happiness.

"Oh! my darling, my darling!" he whispered, "all your troubles are ended now, and such a happy future is before us!"

"Yes, Mr. Lonsdale," Wilkins broke out; "and as you've got years to talk over it 'preps you'll leave Miss Winifred in peace now. Poor lamb! its nigh time she had a little rest," and without ceremony she pushed him gently from the room.

That night Isabel Firman eluded justice by flight from England. She was of age, her own mistress, and she consulted no one as to her future plans.

She left her aunt's house and travelled down to Dover, from whence she sailed for Calais. Then all clue was lost to her whereabouts for very long, and it was quite by accident Mrs. Firman heard she was staying at Naples with a widowed lady, who acted as duenna.

(Continued on page 353.)

## THE LOST STAR.

—30—

### CHAPTER XLV.—(continued.)

LORD ALVERLEY hovered long between life and death. The bone of his left arm had been completely shattered by Marston's bullet, and the shock to his nervous system had been so great that brain fever had supervened. This had tried his strength to an alarming degree; and it was for many weeks doubtful if he would weather the storm.

Doctor Morton was obliged to return to London, and leave him in the hands of Doctor G——, and Sir Arthur was impatient to get back to his wife. Ruby said nothing, but felt that stay at Nise she must, if all the world went and left her alone with her lover.

Lady Chester sent for her daughters, saying that if she had to stay any longer she must have her children with her. A villa was taken just outside the town, and May and Beatrice were never tired of the lovely garden.

Ruby was delighted to see them again, and willingly accepted the Countess's invitation to come and stay with them, as she was anxious to release her uncle.

Sir Arthur was much pleased at the arrangement, and announced his intention of returning to England at once; but Lord Alverley objected to it extremely, and, directly he was told of it, sent out a message that he wished to speak to Miss St. Hellers, if she would be kind enough to come and see him.

She came immediately, with a bunch of roses in her hand, which she laid upon his sofa.

He took her hand in his, and looked up into her face. His own was white, and very grave.

"Do you remember a promise you made me once long ago, when we were in the train together?"

"Yes!" Should she ever forget?

"Out of pity for me, you said if I were a cripple you would marry me. Are you of the same mind still?"

She trembled so that she was obliged to sink down on her knees.

"Why—why do you ask?"

"Because I know, though they won't tell me so, that if I live I shall never be able to use my arm again. Don't cry, dear; if I have you, I shan't care for anything else. Ruby, dear, I don't mind it in the least. A left arm I think what a useless thing it is."

She tried to repress her sob as they should grieve him, and laid her head on the cushion in a vain effort to stifle them. He put out his right arm, and drew it gently down upon his shoulder.

"And now, this is what I want you to do. I want you to marry me—to-morrow or the next day!"

She started up.

"I've been a good-for-nothing fellow all my life, Heaven knows! And now that I am worse than ever, because I'm good-for-nothing, physically as well as morally, I feel that I must secure you for my own. You see I'm selfish to the backbone. I must have you for my wife, a little while, even if you are to be my widow before the month is out. Ruby, will you do it?"

"To-morrow, if you will!" with the tears pouring down her cheeks.

For a long time there was silence, the heart of each was too full for words.

Outside the butterflies were stealing the honey from the lilies, and kissing the dew-drops from the hearts of the roses. The sunshine was resting on the distant Alps, and lighting up their snow-clad summits into torches of flame. The birds were twittering amongst the wreaths of the vines, and peeping from under the grateful shelter of the Eucalyptus. All nature seemed to be joining in one hymn of praise, and the peace and the beauty of the summer's day stole into the darkened room, and lightened the shadow of sorrow with the hope of all-pervading joy.

After earnest consultations between Lady Chester and Sir Arthur, it was agreed that the

wedding should be fixed for Thursday in the next week; Lady Augusta having written to say, that as London was intolerably hot and a perfect desert, she thought it would be the best plan for her to join her husband at Nice, or Cannes, without delay.

The lawyers were telegraphed to at once, and Sir Arthur Craven hurried over to England to talk over the marriage settlements with the Earl. There was no hope of their being finished off before the marriage, every arrangement being additionally complicated by the absence of the bride and bridegroom, but what was not done before, must be completed afterwards.

Lady Augusta said that she would see after the bridal trappings, and she supposed Violet and the three Jerninghams would be bridesmaids.

Ruby only stipulated that her own dress should be as simple as possible, and suggested that bridesmaids would be out of place in a sick-room. Her aunt thought she was mad, because she gave no orders about her trousseau; but when she and Violet arrived at Nice, and saw Lord Alverley—she understood.

His life seemed to be hanging on so frail a thread, that she felt it was indeed far better not to look forward, but to be content with the present as it was.

There was only one person, except the children, who seemed utterly blind to his real condition, and that was Lady Clementina. An undiminished change had come over her during the last two weeks. There was a softened air about her every movement, her voice was more gentle, her temper more subdued. She took long walks by herself upon the hills, and came back only just in time for dinner, tired out, but nevertheless much refreshed in mind. Lady Chester was so much occupied with her son, that she took little notice of her daughter's caprices. Every evening she spent at the hotel, generally accompanied by Clementina, who would sit for some time by Alverley's side, and then slip out of the room into the moonlit gardens, saying that the heat was stifling.

Harold's attention was entirely engrossed by his brother, and his hopes and fears about his own love-dream; but if he had suspected for a moment what was going on behind their backs, it would have startled every other idea out of his head at once.

No suspicion entered his mind however, and Clementina went on her willful way, trembling, it is true, every now and then, at her own audacity, looking back like the others, instead of forward, bewildered by the returning sweetness of an un-forgotten love, and lost like the Hachish drinker, in a newly-found Eden of delight. No angel came to warn her, and the small voice of conscience was unheard, amongst the tumultuous echoes of triumphant passion.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

RUBY ST. HELLERS had gone into the garden for a breath of air late in the evening. Thunder clouds had gathered overhead, and there was an oppression in the atmosphere which boded a storm. She walked slowly up and down under the overhanging roses, her heart full of the morrow, when her girlhood would end and be merged in the wider duties and sympathies of wifehood.

To-morrow she would be Lord Alverley's wife. She had struggled against the first whisperings of love, as if it had been an enemy, not a friend—but the more she fought against it, the more it had grown in strength, till she had given herself up a most willing captive into his outstretched arms, and known that, in some cases, defeat is far more blessed than victory. If Heaven would only spare him to her, how she would devote herself heart and soul to making him happy, and try to repay in some measure all his goodness to her in the past!

Only a little way off, Harold Jerningham had tempted Violet into a secluded corner. Roses of every shade and colour hung over her head, a jessamine climbed up the trellis-work by her side, and snowy daturas opened their white

chalice to the sky, thirsting for the dew that would not come.

The fragrance of the flowers added to the oppression in the air, until the weight in the atmosphere became unbearable. Violet pushed back her hair, and looked up at the darkened sky. "I think I had better go in," she said, after a pause.

"Not yet—not till you have told me whether I am to be the happiest of men!" his voice trembling with sudden agitation.

"What have I to do with it!" turning away to pick a spray off the jessamine.

"Everything! Don't trifle with me. I have loved you ever since that day—when you first hated me. If you hate me still, say so, and I'll never trouble you again!"

She bent her head as if anxious to discover the whereabouts of a spider, which had fallen from the jessamine.

"I don't hate you—I never did!"

"Never!"—his face brightening under the scowling sky. "Not when I interfered so unjustifiably with you and—and——!"

"Don't talk of it," with a slight frown of pain. "I have learnt to be grateful."

"Then he no longer stands between us?" eagerly. "Violet darling, you love me at last!" and he caught her to his breast in radiant joy.

Her head sunk upon his shoulder in loving surrender, her whole heart went out towards him in overflowing happiness; for a year she had been so grudging of the smallest favour, and yet he had never forsaken her, now it was unutterably sweet to give in, and own herself conquered, though against her will.

He stooped and pressed his lips to hers, holding her close against his breast as if he feared that something or somebody would strive to part them even now.

One by one great drops of rain pattered amongst the rose-leaves, but lost in the ecstasy of love's first dream, they were utterly oblivious of the ill to which flesh is heir.

Ruby having no lover to absorb her attention, was hurrying in directly a rain-drop splashed on to her cheek, when she heard Lady Clementina's voice calling to her out of the shadows.

"Do you want me?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes; come here—you will be quite sheltered from the rain!" and a hand was stretched out to guide her under the drooping branches of an ilex.

In the darkness, she became conscious of a third figure sharing the shelter of the same tree, and she wondered if Lord Fielding had suddenly returned to Nice.

"Ruby," began Clementina in an agitated voice, "you were never hard and unforgiving as I was. If anyone who had sinned against you asked your forgiveness—you would never refuse it, would you?"

"I hope not. We all want to be forgiven, more or less!" puzzled by her manner.

"Alverley is getting better, isn't he?" speaking fast and eagerly. "With you to take care of him, he will soon be as well as ever."

"Not his arm—that will be always helpless!" with a deep sigh, repeated as if by an echo.

"It is only his left arm; and he is so young—it's sure to get better. Old bones are so different."

"Yes," but in an awe-struck whisper—"the bone was utterly smashed!"

"I know, but doctors are so clever—and of course, when he gets home, he will have the very best."

There was a rustle amongst the leaves, as if the man, whoever it might be, had moved with an impatient gesture.

Clementina heard it, and said, suddenly—

"Ruby, Captain Marston is utterly broken-hearted at this misfortune of Alverley's, and he asks your forgiveness as well as his."

"Yes," said a deep voice, which she recognised at once with a thrill of aversion. "You don't know how it has cut me up. In a moment of ungovernable rage I challenged him; but on my word of honour, when I saw him lying on the ground, I would have given anything on earth to change places with him! Lord Alverley, I am told, died in the air. If I had only done the same,

I should not be skulking about like a criminal, afraid to show myself in a public place lest men should shun me; but you don't know how he provoked me."

"He had been my friend, mind you, since we were boys at Eton together, and he threw me over at the first mess I got into. He insulted me in the gaming-rooms at Monte Carlo, and what man but an utter cur could stand that! It stung me all the more because I always liked him better than any other man I knew. Can't you understand that I—who were fascinated by him from the first; when no one else could touch your heart!"

"Yes, I understand it," she said, sadly, guessing at the fire of remorse that must have consumed his heart, if she could judge his nature by her own.

"Then you must feel for me," he said, eagerly, as a flash of lightning glinting through the branches cast a lurid light upon his sombre face, and woke it into livid beauty. "And though I have sinned against you and yours"—in a lower voice—"you will know that I'm not a villain past redemption—and you will forgive me, as Lady Clementina, his own sister, has already done. Say you will, for the sake of 'Auld lang syne.'"

There was an earnestness in his manner that really touched her heart, and though she remembered at that moment—even whilst his voice was pleading with her—every one of the offences that he had committed against Violet, Lord Alverley and herself, still, softened by the long watch over a fragile life, she stretched out her hand, and said, gently—

"I forgive you; may you have a better—happier life in store!"

"Heaven bless you!" he muttered hoarsely. "No other woman would have done it, but I thought you would."

She drew her hand hastily away from his fervent clasp, and parting the dripping branches, sped like a bird over the lawn, followed at a short distance by Lady Clementina.

When they reached the balcony, and stopped to shake the rain-drops from their evening dresses, Clementina stooped her proud head suddenly, and kissed her future sister-in-law warmly on both cheeks.

"Thank you, dear," she said with unusual warmth. "You don't know what a weight you have lifted off my mind. I feel as if Alverley had spoken by your mouth."

"It was hard," said Ruby, her lips quivering—"but where should we all be if Heaven judged us as we judge each other!"

Captain Marston stepped from under the tree, and watched till both the white dresses had disappeared into the house. Then he turned to go, but as he turned, a flash of lightning, more vivid than the last, lit up every nook and corner of the garden, and revealed like a picture drawn for his benefit, two figures standing under an archway of roses, the man with his arm round the girl's supple waist, the girl with upturned face leaning against his breast. It was Violet St. Hellers and her lover—but that lover was no longer Robert Marston.

His face changed, a sudden fiend seemed to have broken loose in his passionate heart. He had not known that Violet was in the place. He had thought of her as far out of reach in some country-house in England, and she was here, only a hundred yards off, flaunting her new love before his eyes. At that moment he forgot everything but that she had once promised to be his, and his alone, and he made a few strides forward with the intention of claiming her, even from the shelter of Harold Jerningham's arms. But it was only the madness of a moment, the next he was cursing himself for his folly, and walking hastily under the shadow of the trees towards a door, which he had found very useful, at the bottom of the garden.

He had much to do that night, and yet he seemed disposed to waste his time in idle, vain regret. The sight of Violet's sweet face had woken into fresh vigour the dreams of the past, and all his plans for the future, which had

seemed passably pleasant to him, were embittered by the thought of what might have been once—but never now.

Surely it was something to be successful, even with a changed aim. That aim was high enough—some people might think too high for a man who had made London, for the present, too hot to hold him; and it was only prudent to turn his eyes from the fruit, however tempting, which had been gathered by another hand than his. At least he owed so much to a woman, who had shown herself ready to forgive him—even until seventy-times-seven.

Whilst Captain Marston was walking home to his lodgings through the storm, Lady Clementina was sitting by Lord Alverley's side. When he seemed disposed to listen, she read out to him, and when he was inclined to sleep, she dropped her head upon her hand and watched him with a persistent attention, which bored him exceedingly.

"My father won't be here to-morrow?" he asked, after a long pause, during which he had been listening to the thunder rolling overhead.

"No!" and Lady Chester rose from her seat by the window, that he might not have to exert his voice. He telegraphed his good wishes, and said that he was obliged to stay in London to look after your business, as you couldn't do it yourself. He has paid your debts, my boy; he made up his mind to do it as soon as he heard you were so ill."

The pale face flushed.

"It is very good of him—he knows that I shall never contract another."

"I daresay you will," said Lady Clementina, cheerfully, as if it were much to be desired. "You know the old saying, 'The devil was ill—'"

"Yes, I know," with a smile. "Where's Ruby?" looking round restlessly.

"With her uncle and aunt. She said that she would leave you to us to-night. Sir Arthur has brought her such a lovely pearl necklace—as fine as the one your father gave me when you were born."

"When he thought he had got a splendid specimen of a son and heir!"—with faint sarcasm. "Mother, he'll be good to Ruby!"

"Assuredly, he will. He says that he always thought her the prettiest girl he had ever seen; and the fortune which that old gentleman left her makes it a very good match for you."

Alverley relapsed into silence. Presently he looked up when they thought he was asleep: "Did Sir Arthur bring the diamonds?"

"Yes," said his sister; "Shall I fetch them?"

"Thanks, I'm rather tired."

"Good-night!" and she bent down to kiss him. "Alverley!"—in a hurried whisper—"I know I've often been horribly cross to you—I thought of it so when you were ill; but we've been good friends always, haven't we?"

"Yes; what are you thinking of?"

"Nothing, only—only to-morrow," she answered vaguely, and hurried from the room.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

This next morning was unusually over-cast for the bright climate of Nice; it was supposed that the weather had been upset by the storm.

The proprietor of the hotel, Signor Palmieri, had placed one of the largest sitting-rooms in the house at the Countess's disposal for the wedding ceremony; but she had declined it with many thanks, saying that her son could not bear the exertion of being moved from one room to another.

Falling this, Lord Alverley's bedroom had been decorated with a whole garden of flowers—roses sparkling with rain-drops, lilies with their white cups full of water from the skies, heliotrope and jessamine, myrtle, datura—all the sweeter because the sun had not withered them, filled every vase and every corner, and hung in wreaths round the mantelpiece and doorway, whilst the fairest and purest adorned the altar improvised

for the occasion. The bed was screened from view by the pale blue curtains which were drawn across the alcove in which it stood.

One o'clock was the hour fixed for the wedding, but Lady Chester, accompanied by May and Beatrice, arrived long before.

"I suppose Clementina will follow later on," she said, with a flattered sigh; "but she was not at home when I started, and I could not wait. How is he?"

Harold shrugged his shoulders. "As weak as ever, only awfully anxious to have it over. He seems possessed by the thought that he will lose her after all."

The Countess wiped away a tear. "Has he sent her the stars?"

"He gave them to her himself, directly he was up. She shivered when she first saw them, and then she said, she should value them more than anything else, because she might never have known how good he was, if it had not been for the lost star."

"Poor child! I'm sure it cost her sorrow enough. Is she ready?" moving in the direction of Ruby's room.

"Wait a bit, mother, I have something to say to you!" placing herself in front of her.

"Now don't tell me any bad news—I'm quite upset enough already."

"Bad news! There is no better in the world," he cried, joyously. "Violet St. Heliers has promised to be my wife!"

Lady Chester looked as if she had been shot, the power of speech seemed taken from her.

"Aren't you glad? Don't you wish me joy?" feeling her silence acutely.

"My dear boy, you took me so by surprise. She's a very charming girl; but—but she was once very nearly married, if not quite, to that wretched Captain Marston."

"I know she was! and now she is going to be married wholly and entirely to me. Alverley's delighted. But what will my father say?" looking with sparkling eyes into her bewildered face.

"Heavens knows! I can't think of it to-day. One wedding at a time is quite enough," and poor Lady Chester sank down upon a chair.

Presently the Rev. Canon—who was to perform the service by special license, was announced, and introduced to Lady Augusta. A desultory conversation ensued, interspersed with wondering remarks at the continued absence of Clementina.

Harold was with Lord Alverley, administering some stimulant in order to enable him to get through the service without breaking down.

There was a pause of expectation, and then a low murmur outside in the corridor told that the bride was approaching.

The door was thrown open, pale, but perfectly composed, Ruby entered, leaning on Sir Arthur's arm, followed by Violet, Lady Marian and Lady Beatrice.

They were all dressed in white, but very simply on account of the peculiarly tragic circumstances under which the wedding took place. The bride's veil was fastened on by diamond stars, which glistened with wonderful brilliancy on her bright brown hair; her dress was beautifully embroidered by hand, and trimmed with lace and real orange blossom.

She looked very lovely, but seemed to walk in a dream, as if her thoughts were so intense that she was scarcely conscious of the presence of anyone else. The others fell behind, as if in a small procession, and they entered Lord Alverley's room in solemn silence.

He was lying on the sofa dressed for the first time in a frock coat, buttoned across the chest, and dark grey trousers. The wounded arm was in a sling. He raised his head as the door opened, and looked round eagerly.

When he had met an answering glance from Ruby's eyes, he seemed satisfied, and sank back upon his cushions.

His mother placed herself at the head of the sofa, facing the Canon, who was standing immediately in front of the altar.

Violet, pale and much agitated, for her sister's sake as well as her own, stood nearest the bride, with the children close behind.

Harold stood close to his brother's sofa, ready to fulfil his duties as best man, or chief nurse, as might be most wanted. Lady Augusta and her husband were side by side, to the left of the bride. She had dressed herself in dark violet velvet to suit the solemnity of the occasion, and she was nearly melting away in consequence.

At the last moment, just as the Canon had taken his book in his hand, Lady Clementina hurried in, and panting for want of breath, placed herself somewhere in the background.

The service, never very long, was made as short as possible. Lord Alverley kept up bravely, but there was scarcely a dry eye in the room, as in accents that would falter, in spite of his best endeavour, he vowed to love and to cherish—"till death us do part." To some of them it seemed as if the parting could not be far off, and his mother sobbed aloud.

When the ring was placed on his bride's finger he leant back with closed eyes, and remained so still that Lady Chester and Harold watched him in silent fear. But when the final benediction had been given, he looked up into Ruby's face with a look of endless love, and whispered: "Now I am happy."

All the others went slowly out of the room, and left the husband and wife together. Ruby threw back her veil, and sank down on her knees by his side, his hand clasped tightly in hers. The happiness in their hearts was too great for words but the same prayer rose up from both to the throne of Grace—"Heaven grant that we mayn't be parted."

The luncheon, which no one but the *chef* of the hotel called a wedding breakfast, went off as cheerfully as could be expected, when everyone present, except the children, was conscious of a sigh lurking behind every smile.

May was in high spirits at the idea of having her beloved "Miss Saliers," for a sister; and Beatrice asserted that if she wouldn't come and live with them at the Chase, she would ask her if she might not come and live with her instead.

"But Alverley won't want you!" objected May, as she shut up a peach, and lost all the juice. "He never liked us to be with him too much, only a little at a time."

"Mamma, will you take us to that place where the roses grow?" asked Beatrice eagerly. "You know we ought to do something particular on a wedding-day."

"By all means, let us go to the Villa Gastand," said Lady Augusta, promptly. "What do you say, Lady Chester; shall I take them, if you would rather not come?"

"I will come if they like. There is nothing to keep me here; and I shall be delighted to have you for a companion. The carriage had better be ordered about half-past four. What are you going to do, Clementina?" turning to her daughter, who seemed lost in thought.

"Oh! I'm going home," she said, quickly. "I have rather a headache."

"Ah! what made you so late this morning? You kept me in a fever."

"I went down into the town, and I did not know how the time passed. Are you off, Harold?"

"Yes I am going to send off the notices to the English papers, and write to my father. Anything you want?"

"Nothing. Poor dear mother," stooping down and kissing her—a most unusual tenderness for Clementina to indulge in. "How tired you look! Good-bye, Lady Augusta," shaking hands. Turning to Violet, she lowered her voice to a whisper. "I am so glad to hear we are to be sisters. Good-bye. Ruby looked lovely to-day!"

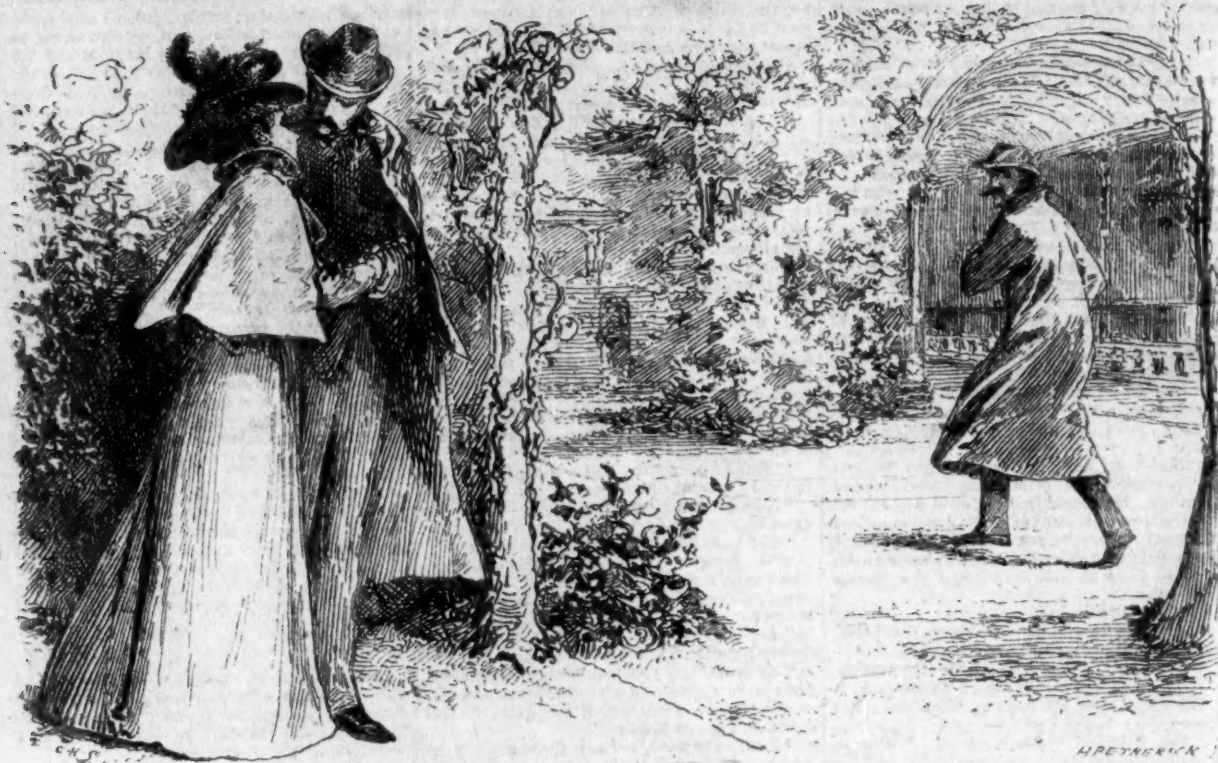
Harold followed her out of the room, and put her into the carriage which was waiting.

She leant over the side and looked earnestly into his face. "Alverley is sure to be better soon!"

He shook his head. "Not sure by any means!"

"Tell him I wouldn't disturb him to say good-bye."

"He is not likely to know if we do or don't. He has Ruby with him, and that is enough for



CAPTAIN MARSTON BEHOLDS VIOLET ST. HELIERS AND HER LOVER—HAROLD JERMINHAM.

him. Ta-ta, I shall dine with the Cravens to-night!"

He waved his hand, she smiled in answer, with such unusual affection in her glance, that he went up the steps, thinking to himself: "Poor girl, she is very much improved. I think she was more hurt than she liked to own, by Marston's desertion."

Two hours later, he was watching the steamer *La Cosse et l'Italie* making its way across the blue Mediterranean, towards the distant island of Corsica. He looked at it, scarcely conscious that his eyes were fixed upon it, and little guessing as he stood there quietly smoking his cigarette on the balcony, that his own sister was speeding away on it from home, and family, and friends, with the only man he hated in the world—Robert Marston!

He remained in happy ignorance, till Lady Chester, in a state of the greatest agitation, made her appearance in the Cravens' sitting-room, just as they were about to sit down to dinner. She put an open letter into Harold's hand, gasped out: "Read that!" and sank in a fit of hysterics on a chair.

Violet and Lady Augusta ran to her assistance, whilst Harold read the letter. It was very short and ran thus:—

"I was married to Captain Marston at St. Michel's, Rue St. Michel, this morning. Knowing that you would never give your consent, I thought it was no good to ask it. Hoping that your heart will soften to us in time, and praying you to remember that I loved him long ago.—Your affectionate child,

"CLEMENTINA MARSTON"

Harold crushed the paper indignantly in his hand.

"As she has sown, so shall she reap. Never in this world will I speak to her again!"

"Don't say that! Perhaps you never told her all!" said Violet, tearfully.

"He has stolen my child!" sobbed the Countess.

"Somebody must go after them and bring her back!"

"If I went after them, it would only be to give him a second horsewhipping, as the first was not enough for him," he said, sternly.

"Excuse me, Lady Augusta, I cannot dine with you. I must be off to the church at once, to see if there is any possibility of upsetting the marriage. If there is, of course I must follow her as quickly as possible; and you, I hope, will give her the sort of reception she deserves!"

Captain Marston was too wide-awake to leave a loop-hole for Lord Chester to make use of. Every formality had been duly observed, and the proper names had been written in the register. Lady Clementina was of age, and if she chose to take a scoundrel for her husband, nobody could unloose the tie which bound the pair for weal or woe together. They lived on the Continent for many years, enjoying themselves in rather a reckless fashion, she as a leader of *ton* amongst the fastest sets, he as a desperate gambler who had once broken the bank at Monaco, and was likely to do so again.

It was long before they came to England. Time had softened the remembrance of past injuries, and Lady Chester felt a yearning for her daughter, which would not be denied.

Lord Chester reluctantly gave her permission to invite Lady Clementina and Captain Marston to Chester Chase; but Harold Jerminham refused to let his wife meet them, either there or anywhere else, and he remained true to his determination for the rest of his life.

In the spring, when the lilacs and laburnums were all in bloom, and the birds were singing in every hedge, there were triumphal arches over the gray-stony gateway of The Besses and in the centre of the avenue, as a carriage and four dashed up to the door, and the Viscountess of Alverley, with her husband by her side, stood on the steps of the stately portico, to return with many happy smiles the cheers of her tenants. By constant care and never-failing love she had

rescued Lord Alverley from the very jaws of death, and to have him with her in her own home, restored to health, though still very delicate, seemed to make this careworn earth a reflex of Heaven!

"To-morrow, Violet and Harold and dear old Mrs. Upton, and a lot of people come!" she said, as she led him into her own private boudoir, "but to-day we are alone."

"Together," he added, with a smile. "I am getting so selfish, I don't seem to wish for anyone else."

His long illness, and the constant conviction that death was stalking his steps, had made Lord Alverley a wiser man, and the good resolutions formed in haste on the balcony of the Hotel des Méditerranées were not forgotten at leisure, when he had finally captured his "Lost Star."

[THE END.]

YOUNG chickens and other birds frequently break the bones of their legs, and if properly attended to these fractures can be easily cured with very little trouble. As soon as the injury is noticed, the fracture must be carefully cleaned and washed with warm water, and then wrapped with a bit of antiseptic cotton. Splints are then prepared for the fractured limb, preferably of split elderwood, the pith of which is taken out. These splints are fastened to the cotton with a drop of glue, and held tightly in place by being wound with linen thread. The bandage and dressing are left undisturbed for from three to four weeks; then the leg is soaked in tepid water until the bandage comes off easily. The fracture will have completely healed in that time. Canaries and other pet birds can be similarly treated in case of a fracture of a leg, only the elder splints are substituted by pieces of cardboard, and the bandage is left but two weeks on the little winged patients.



"EVE HAS HER HUSBAND!" SAID BERRY, "YOU OUGHT NOT TO COME BETWEEN THEM!"

## BROWN AS A BERRY.

—201—

### CHAPTER XX.

"BERRY! you have grown quite a woman!"  
"And, Eve, you have developed into an Eastern princess—with house, gardens, and slaves all to correspond! It is such a bewildering transformation scene, that I am completely dazzled, and can scarcely believe in the old days at Sarchodon Villa, with Susan as *major domo*, and everything else as well."

Eve shrugs her pretty shoulders with a gesture of disgust.

"Those wretched days! How could we ever have endured them!"

"Necessity knows no law!" answers Berry a little dryly; vexed at what seems like heartless forgetfulness of the many happy hours they had spent together, in spite of poverty and their other discomforts.

It is the morning after her arrival, and they are alone in the verandah after breakfast; while in the front of the bungalow an ayah is carrying the baby, and a bearer is holding a white umbrella over its sleeping face. Anxious to turn the conversation, Berry asks for a nearer view, and Eve calls the woman to her, listening with gratified pride to the encomiums passed upon it.

"Your eyes, Eve, and your mouth and chin. Not a bit like Colonel Chester!"

"Not a bit!" answers Eve, complacently. Certainly she has good excuse for the vanity implied, even if there be none for the lack of wisely enthusiasm.

Eve Cardell had always been a pretty girl—but Mrs. Chester, with her added womanly grace, and the new softness that comes into her face when looking on her child, is lovelier than ever—and Berry cannot find it in her heart to call her to account. She looks so fragile, too, and fair in the soft black gown she has donned this morning, in compliment to her sister's deep crape, after

apologising for the unmourning garb in which she had been discovered the day before.

"India is so different from England," she had said, with a faint blush of shame.

"It seems so," Berry had answered.

"And one has no near relations, whose prejudices must be respected."

"We were never burdened with them at home."

"Besides," continues Eve, in the same conciliatory strain, "it is too hot for anything but the slightest clothes. You will be converted in time!"

Berry smiles.

"I am not so bigoted. I will promise not to melt quite away in my black gown, for the sake of upholding the good old English manners and customs; and—" she adds, more seriously, "perhaps it is because there was so little love that I should not like one of the outward conformities of respect to be missing—in my case, at least."

"Ah, poor papa!" says Eve, with a sigh, for she had been his favourite child, and, consequently, had liked him best in return.

"Mem Sahib, shall I take babe?"

It is the ayah who breaks into their conversation. She had been standing unnoticed by their side, as half unconsciously Berry has retained the child in her arms, soothing it to sleep again with a gentle, rocking movement.

Eve starts and looks round sharply.

"Yes, take him in. It is getting too hot outside!" she answers, hastily; and watches the woman out of sight with an evident air of relief.

"That ayah—how I hate her!" she explains. "It is a positive trial to have her near me. I distrust her so! Good as she really is, and attentive always, I cannot conquer the strange feeling of repulsion that came over me when I saw her first!"

"But, Eve, if you feel like that, why do you keep her?"

"It is my own fault. I was staying with friends in the plains, and unfortunately mislaid

a brooch—one that had been Margaret's, you will remember it—a silver spray of bells. In my first anger and distress I accused this woman of stealing it, and she was sent away. Well, a few days later, I found it caught in the lace of a bonnet I had worn; and afterwards, when I saw the woman again, in my remorse, at the injustice I had done her, I foolishly took her into my service, in spite of my instinctive dislike!"

"But she seems a good ayah and fond of baby; she speaks English, too."

"For all of which reasons I do not like to dismiss her, having no real cause, and yet—and yet—"

"I do not like thee, Doctor Fell!" quotes Berry, laughing, and then grows grave again, as she remembers how she, too, had once before felt that same unreasoning dislike to, and distrust of, her sister's husband.

"Yes, I suppose that is it. Now shall we go in?" And, laughing a little, Eve gathers her dark draperies around her, and moves into the bungalow with a careless grace that is utterly in unison with the beauty all around her; the radiant sky, the rustling trees, and the exquisite flowers, that are grouped and trailed all over the verandah with prodigal Eastern magnificence.

Berry follows her regretfully.

"He feels at scars that never felt a wound."

And as yet Berry cannot believe in the treacherous heat of an Indian sun, nor realise that each ray can conceal such deadly weapons against health and reason. She would like nothing better than to revel in that glorious sunshine. It is all so brilliant and beautiful—so unlike what she has seen before.

The valley that stretches down from their garden's edge looks so inviting in its possibilities of hidden flowers and ferns. The trees that grow down it, all gnarled and twisted, twined one with another in a close embrace, that is riveted by sprays of ivy and branches of wild briar; while in spots there is a touch of pale sea-blue among the universal green, as a luscious gum-

tree rears its head in ambitious emulation of the clustering pines around. There is, too, at the bottom of the valley, half covered by the over-running jungle grasses that surround it, the bed of a streamlet, dry now, but its course marked by a trail of gleaming glistening stone, white like marble and with the sparkle of a diamond here and there. The birds, too, with their changing colours as the light plays upon their plumage, are like moving gems as they dart to and fro among the flowers—and the flowers themselves are beautiful as only flowers can be when growing in such wild unpruned luxuriance.

Berry sighs and passes through the verandah door, where her sister's ayah meets her and drops a servile courtesy. Brushing past her with something of the same instinctive aversion to which Eve has confessed, Berry enters the drawing-room hastily.

"The ayah is outside; I thought you sent her in with baby!" she says at once, and then feels half-ashamed of the rancour with which she has spoken.

What has the woman done, that she should thus strive to get her into trouble? But Eve has forgotten her animosity and answers, easily—

"Baby has an ayah of his own and a bearer; that other woman is supposed to be my maid, and is only an occasional worshipping at his shrine. Baby is a personage, you know, with a capital P."

"And baby's mamma is equally imposing. Who would have thought Sarchedon Villa was fostering such sybaritic tastes!"

Eve's smile is rather mirthless. She does not remember those trials that were of old, and the contrast between then and now has ceased to be glaringly striking. She looks so thoroughly to the manner born, so essentially a child of fortune, that Berry wonders at her own tamerly in reminding her of those less prosperous days.

"Do you remember the dinner when Colonel Chester came for the first time? What an excitement that was!"

Eve is silent. Evidently she does not relish these reminiscences.

"And the pretty frock you wore at the farewell dance? You know you gave it me, and I wore it twice at the depot galestia. I assure you it was most enthusiastically received."

"I daresay you looked very well," listlessly.

"They told me so," demurely.

Eve looks up a little interested now, and relieves that the conversation can be turned.

"Who told you so? Berry, have you a lover yet?"

"I am seventeen!"

The droll assumption of wisdom and womanly experience with which this is said, provokes Eve's laughter and something of her admiration.

"I see, I need not have asked. Tell me, though, is one more favoured than the rest?"

"What! do you want to get rid of me so soon?"

"My dear, don't be foolish. Tell me who it is!"

"How would you like to see me the wife of a leading member of the cottonocracy, a civic magnate unapproachable in the stiffness of my new unaccustomed magnificence, and rolling about provincial streets in a yellow chariot, that is at once the delight of little boys and a terror to those of the populace who have infringed the civic laws?"

And Berry prances up and down the room, with an absurd affectation of grandeur and a well-simulated admiration for the costly skirts that are supposed to be trailing in her wake.

"That is nonsense, of course, or you would not jest about it!"

"That brilliant fate might once have been mine; and"—with a little sentimental air—"I am not sure that I was wise to let it elude my grasp."

"Was he such a good man, Berry?"

"The best I had known then."

"But you have seen someone else since? You are too pretty to have had one lover only."

"Yes, there was one more."

"Only one?"

"One is enough, when it is the right one."

"Ah!—yes," with a strangled sigh.

"And this is my true sweetheart. The only one I shall have so long as we both shall live."

"That is an extract from the marriage service, surely! Pray who, what, and where is this hero of romance?"

She speaks rather sarcastically, and with a tinge of envy, remembering how the brightness was all swept out of her own young life by one hasty inconsiderate act. But Berry, full of this new happiness of hers does not notice, and answers with dreamy tenderness—

"He is the best, handsomest, and bravest man you ever saw. His looks are those of a god, as the saying goes; but I doubt if any gods ever had such deep blue eyes and raven hair; his manners and his actions are those of an admirable Orlington. He is a Captain of the — Lancers, and is stationed at Meer Meer. But he will come and see us soon, and you shall judge for yourself how incomparable he is, and what a lucky girl I am. Eve, I will never forgive you if you do not confess he is irresistible then!"

"But his name?" impatiently.

"His name is John Carew."

"Great Heavens!"

Eve has risen from her seat and stands before her sister, flushed and discomposed with indignation.

"You are saying that as a joke! You will not really make me believe that you have condescended even to know that man!"

"Why," whispers Berry faintly, and in her consternation can say no more.

"You ask why! and yet you seemed indignant enough when I told you the history of his perfidy."

"You—told—me—the—history of his perfidy!"

"Have you forgotten how he deserted Margaret that you let him deceive you too?" asks Eve, bitterly contemptuous of what she deems her sister's unpardonable weakness.

"Margaret—deserted!" murmurs Berry, hoarsely, still incapable of anything but an echo in her horrible bewilderment.

"Do you mean to say you never connected the John Carew you knew with the John Carew I told you of that day?"

"I? No. How could you think it!—I had forgotten his name even."

Struck by the weakness in the girl's voice, Eve glances at her hastily, and at sight of the small white face with the great grey eyes agape, and the red all faded from her quivering lips, feels a twinge of compunction.

In her hot indignation she has spoken so cruelly, not guessing that it was only in ignorance that so heinous a sin had been committed against her sister's memory; now something in Berry's expression tells her that though the offences will not be condoned, yet the revenge will strike both ways, and the judge suffers perhaps even more than the judged. She stretches out her arms full of compassion and tries to draw her sister to her breast.

"Berry, my poor darling, what can I say to comfort you!"

But Berry pushes her aside, intolerant of sympathy that comes so far short of the sorrow. It seems as if she were grown a hundred years old as, with beating heart but hot and tearless eyes, she escapes and flies to her own room.

There, prone upon upon her bed, she lies all through the burning hours of midday, and passes alone through that experience of pain which is her woman's portion.

The brilliant mocking sun outside is flooding the floor with golden light, and through the window comes the heavy scent of flowers, the soothing sounds of happy birds and bees; but heedless of all alike she lies almost as in a trance, while the sweetest knowledge of her life dies out of it, as it seems, for ever.

She does not even notice the flight of time nor answer when Eve in fearful faltering accents begs for admittance. This one day at least she will call her own—to blot out the past and nerve herself to meet the future bravely.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE monsoon has burst a month ago, and, after the first violence is abated, the rain falls gently, but persistently, pattering down softly on the hard dry earth, and healing with its cool sweet touch all that the sun has tried so hard to destroy. The trees have wrapped themselves in coats of moss, out of which tufts of feathery ferns are peeping shyly, scarcely believing yet in the flag of truce held out by their cruel enemy, the sun. Even the birds seemed to have gained new life and sing with added sweetness and delight; and a dozen different shades of green gladden the jaded eye wherever it may rest. From the swaying pines comes a pure refreshing scent, and the ground is brown with its faded fallen spores. June has wept her heart out in a turbulent grief that will not be consoled, but July is smiling through her tears like a lovely woman repenting of her pain. The sullen clouds are parted for a time, and the eager sun shoots out its brilliant rays, seeking old, sweet summer haunts, and the flowers rear their drooping heads, drinking in fresh courage from his beaming smile.

Deep down in the valleys tiny streamlets leap gaily over the stones and break into miniature waterfalls as they meet resistance on their way. Each day as it comes discovers new beauties that nature, until then, had concealed and the skies stretch over all, calm, new and exquisitely fair.

To Berry the time has been marked by the pain she has crowded into it, the tears she has wept at night, and the smiles she has forced on to her lips by day. She is aghast at the strength of her own passion. It should have been easy to dismiss so unworthy a lover from her thoughts, and yet she finds herself dwelling upon the words he had whispered and the lingering touches of his hand with unpardonable tenderness instead of only remembering to condemn.

Eve had tried once to re-open the subject, with no success. Berry had turned upon her with the fierceness of a young tigress.

"Leave me alone," she had said, wildly. "My love is my own and my pain. Do not interfere with either." And, awed by the tragedy in her voice, which is too sublime to be ridiculous, Eve says no more.

Colonel Chester notices nothing. He had seen that Berry was grown more womanly, and her added quietness only confirms the correctness of his impression. Berry and he had been growing friends of late. Thrown upon their own society they had learned to like each other better; and their morning rides together have been the sole enjoyment the girl has allowed herself since she came, four months ago. Her mourning garb has been a plausible excuse for not joining in any of the station galestia. The only visits she has made have been to the convalescent barracks, where some of the old regiment are quartered; and even these she has found disappointing, for the women removed from the pressure of want, after the manner of their kind, have become thriftless, and are more inclined for gossip than domesticity.

Eve, too, spends much of her time indoors. Her mornings are given to the baby; and in the afternoons, when the showers that have fallen through the day have cooled the air and made it fresh with fragrance, she is generally to be found on the verandah book in hand, or with Ronald May beside her wasting away the sweetest of the four-and-twenty hours.

At last she brings down upon herself Berry's expressed disapprobation.

"Why does Ronald come so often?" she asks, with something of her old abruptness.

"Because he wishes, I suppose; because we are old friends, and because he knows no one else here well," answers Eve, uncomfortably.

"There is Mrs. Lee-Brooke."

"Talking to her is as bad as reading the 'Personal Notes' in a society paper. Why should you wish him so hard a fate! You used to be fond of Ronald."

"I like him still."

"Then you never 'tell your love.' He was wondering only the other day how he had fallen from your favour."

"I think him disimproved."  
"Perhaps his prosperity has turned his head," Eve suggests smiling.

"Prosperity!"  
"Yes. Did you not know he had come into a fortune since he had been here?"

"No; I never heard."  
"Well, it is a fact. He is rolling in riches now, and will leave the service soon. India does not suit him, and he was so ill in the plains that they gave him six months' leave."

"How unfortunate!"  
"What—his prosperity?"  
"Everything. His being here. Eve, I cannot forget what passed between you before, even if you can."

"I cannot!" And Eve's lovely eyes, dim with a mist of tears, lift themselves in mute agony to her sister's face. The next moment she breaks into a silvery peal of half hysterical laughter, at the horror there depicted.

But Berry cannot smile, she is too thunder-struck to even speak as the full enormity of Eve's confession conveys itself to her mind.

"You were not in earnest?" she gasps at last.

"I was. I am still. Why should I deny it? It is my misery, not my shame."

"It is both. Oh! it is too terrible to be true!"

"I wish it were," answers Eve, utterly sobered now, turning away with a deep sigh, and yet feeling something like relief at having thrown half the burden of her guilty knowledge on another. Perhaps it is more in thoughtlessness than with selfish intent she has spoken, not guessing how much more heavily this will weigh upon her sister than herself. She is naturally so light-hearted, and carries life's cares with an insouciance Berry cannot emulate. To her, with her sensitive spirit, at once impressionable and slow to forget, it is positive torture to share such a secret. All day long she goes about with drooped eyes, not daring to meet the gaze of anyone, knowing what she does.

It jars upon her ear like a false note in music when she hears Eve talking carelessly on indifferent subjects as though she had not a trouble in the world. How is it possible she can ever laugh again, or touch the soft, innocent face of her child with such perjured lips?

When Colonel Chester comes in, very grave, and sterner even than his wont, she shivers apprehensively, dreading the worst. And her fears are not altogether groundless.

It had happened, by a strange coincidence, that that very afternoon, lounging in the assembly-room, paper in hand, Colonel Chester had heard voices on the verandah, his attention being arrested by the sound of his own name.

"Mrs. Chester and her 'bow-wow'!"

He has mixed so little with his fellow-men that he attaches no meaning to the word, and, innocently supposing that his wife's pug was the subject of discussion, would have thought no more of the matter had not the lady addressed answered with an affected laugh—

"I thought you never used slang terms, and what a shame to accuse Mrs. Chester of possessing anything so dreadful!"

A moment later they enter the room together, and, not even knowing him by sight attach no importance to his presence there. Captain Burdett is at another table, languidly turning over the leaves of *Punch*, and Mr. Le Sage is at his elbow, chatting volubly over the events of the week. He is talking now of a station picnic that had been the day before.

"You ought to have been there, Burdett."

"Yes, I am so fond of such things—always," with a sarcastic smile. "Who was there to make this particular gaiety such a desirable one?"

"Oh! I didn't mean to say it was anything out of the way. There were the usual amount of grass-widows and bow-wows, I thought it was fun."

"The buoyancy of youth," observes Captain Burdett, laconically.

"What is a bow-wow?"

The question comes upon them both like a bombshell. The word, always vulgar and absurd, sounds doubly so dropping solemnly, as it does,

from Colonel Chester's lips. Captain Burdett clasps his hand over his mouth, and ducks his head to smother a laugh; but Lawrence Le Sage, less gifted with a humorous sense of the ridiculous, and standing more in awe of his chief, answers, hurriedly—

"It's only nonsense, sir; a word they have out here for 'admirers of married ladies.'"

"Sort of fetch-and-carry dogs of purely Indian growth—quite indispensable to the climate, I am told," puts in Captain Burdett, still chuckling.

"Well, at any rate, they save the husbands trouble," adds young Le Sage.

"And the payment for these valuable services!" asks Colonel Chester, disagreeably, and with a whiteness about his lips that was not noticeable before.

"It is a debt of honour," answers Captain Burdett, meaningly; and Colonel Chester, making no other comment, the subject is allowed to drop.

Long after the others have left, he sits there still, brooding over what he had heard until it becomes a positive nightmare to him. His mind, warped by previous unfortunate experience, takes so distorted a view of the case that he can scarcely bring himself to go home and look upon his wife's fair face again until he can know for a surety that it is not also false.

He had thought her above suspicion, and yet these perfect strangers have spoken of her lightly.

Can it be that he has been mistaken in her, and that she is not so cold to others as she is to him? A memory of old sweeps across his brain, so potent and full of misery that he can no longer remain inert.

He staggers to his feet and goes quickly from the room. The fresh air meeting him cools his heated brow, and dispels some of his most morbid fancies.

What seemed probable before now assumes impossible exaggerated proportions, and he can almost laugh at himself for his folly.

"Be thou as pure as ice and chaste as snow thou shalt not escape calumny!" These words, or words like to these, ring reproachfully in his ears.

India is proverbially the country of scandal; how could he listen for a moment to such idle words! How, even with unquestionable evidence before him, could he admit the possibility of his wife's untruth!

The last lingering doubt fades entirely from his mind when he reaches home, after a long aimless walk among the winding paths that cover the hills like a gigantic net-work.

Eve is in the verandah, seated in a perfect nest of trailing purple flowers, and cooling soft, unintelligible language to the baby on her knee.

She looks so womanly and sweet—so above his unworthy thoughts—that he breathes a deep sigh of relieved content, as he stoops and gently kisses her smooth, white brow.

Utterly reassured for the time he does not notice how Berry shivers, and moves away into the house, out of sight of what seems to her like a place of bad acting, in which not even the performers can take delight.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"Eve, have you ever regretted that you married me?"

Jealousy is certainly the most difficult of all demons to exorcise. Although Colonel Chester had successfully cast it away from him at first, it had returned, after a few days, like that other demon in the Scriptures, and brought with it (or, at least, so it seems to him) seven other devils worse than itself.

His mind had been swept clear of all other thoughts and feelings by the magnitude of that terrible suspicion, and so, unfortunately, there is ample room for doubts and fears to enter and take root.

A dozen times a day he finds new food for self-torturing conjecture, and, at last, though knowing well the futility of all such questioning, cannot refrain from asking for the truth.

"Eve, have you ever regretted that you married me?"

"Gracious, Alex! What do you mean?"

She has been sitting with her back to him at a small-writing table, and now turns round and faces him with a start.

"What I say. Does it take so long to concoct an answer to my question?"

"I think you have no right to speak like that. It is an insult to suppose that I have any need to concoct a reply to anything you might ask!" with an indignation that is the greater because she feels she is not free from blame.

"I beg your pardon!"

He has put himself so palpably in the wrong that she might have evaded the subject altogether only that, with a woman's unwisdom, she cannot leave well alone.

"Why should you doubt me?" she says, with an angelic pout.

"Was I very unjust?" a little bitterly, and yet relenting, in spite of himself, at seeing her beautiful face wearing that expression of distress. So weakly does woman's strength lie in man's weakness.

He comes forward and lays his hand on her shoulder.

"My darling, if I feared it was because I loved you so!"

Eve stretches out her plump white arms from which the loose, cool sleeves have fallen back, and looks at them with comical distaste.

"Are these the wasted limbs of a hapless heroine—a victim of despair? Am I long, lean, and unlovely, like a mediæval maiden whose lover (or whose dinner) has disagreed with her? Do I look unhappy, Alex?"

"You are all that is sweet and good and true." I was a brute to have doubted you for a moment!

Her arms fall heavily to her side. Having succeeded in her intent to deceive she cannot rest content, but with characteristic inconsistency strives to undo what she has done.

"Alex, I am not worthy of you!" she murmurs, humbly.

"You said that once before at Sarchedon Villa."

Ah me! Those dear old days. Will their memory never leave her—never fade!

As he speaks there flashes before her mind's eye with kaleidoscopic brilliancy those coloured vials in the chemist's window opposite their home. All those horrors, too, over which she has so often shuddered, are now invested with an idealistic halo. She would give worlds to see them again.

For the instant it seems as though she had gained her wish, and in fancy she stands at the little rickety gate waiting for Ronald May. He comes behind her and lays his hand upon her shoulder, and she turns to meet him with a loving, eager smile only to encounter instead that other darkly frowning face which has come into her life like an adverse fate. Which was fancy! which is fact! She closes her eyes and then slowly reopens them.

It is her husband beside her, his fingers grasping her shoulder tightly, not in affection, but evident marital wrath.

"Is the past so sweet to you that you utterly ignore the present—and me?"

"Forgive me, I was in a dream!"

"So it appeared. It was a pity to awake you."

She turns back to the table without reply, taking up a quill and nervously playing with it to hide her confusion. Her apparent indifference maddens him still more, all the naturally wild, untamed nature of the man breaking loose and showing itself in his livid colour and glowing eyes.

"Are you deaf?" he asks, fiercely. "Why cannot you speak?"

But Eve's cowardice is more moral than physical, and she does not shrink from his almost threatening gesture.

"Do you intend often to favour me with such scenes?" she asks, with quiet scorn.

"I intend to have an answer to my first question!"

"Then you must ask me it again, for you have asked me so many questions this morning that I cannot call that particular one to mind."

"Do you regret our marriage?" he repeats, doggedly.

For a moment she hesitates. Shall she throw herself upon his mercy and confess all; fall from the high pinnacle on which he has placed her, and destroy the delicate fabric she has woven? The truth so long delayed would be no virtue now, but a needlessly cruel blow. Must she with her own hands thrust away all hope of her happiness and his?

It is with a feeling of something like the heroism of unselfishness that the falsehood falls from her lips.

"No!"

His face softens, and he moves a little farther away from her.

"I did not frighten you into saying that!"

"No!"

And then, again, with her usual buoyancy rising above the seriousness of the occasion, she adds, coquettishly,—

"But it was surely not the happiest method of propounding a sentimental problem? Confess you were a little like an amorous highwayman clamouring so loudly after 'my love or my life!'"

The dewy sea-blue eyes are raised to his confidently, and the lips are parted in a lovely mocking smile. What can he say in reply? He can only take her in his arms and shower caresses on the exquisite face that is declaredly all his own.

"Take care," she says, flushed and smiling still when he releases her at last. "Do not try to win a second wife with so violent a wooing."

"One wife is surely enough!" with a forced smile.

"More than enough, I should say, at a time; but, of course, I meant only in the event of anything happening to me. Some nice elderly woman I would advise you to take next time. Girls hate widowers!"

"Are you as prejudiced as most? Would you have refused me if I had had a wife before?"

"I think so; I don't know."

"And if the knowledge only now came to you that it had happened so, would you leave me?"

"That is an impossibility which needs no discussion."

"We have talked so much nonsense to-day that a little more or less is of no account. Forget it all if you can."

His face is turned away, but from the nervous pressure of his hands that are holding hers she knows he is deeply moved. Is it to banish the recollection of his first severity that he has been talking with such apparent purposelessness. Well, if he can jest while feeling so strongly so can she. Her smile is as guileless as an infant, and as free from care when she answers, quietly,—

"I will forget everything except that I took you 'for better and for worse.' This is worse!"

But when she is once again alone the smile fades into nothingness, and she drops her head upon the writing-table with a lassitude born of despair.

Her woman's wit has won the day, it is true; but at what a cost!

So Berry finds her bowed and crushed with grief when she comes to summon her to luncheon.

"Eve, what is it! Are you ill?"

"Do I look so?"

"Yes."

"I am not surprised. I never shall be surprised at anything again."

"That is a weighty resolution. What has caused it?" smiling a little at her sister's tragic tone. But Eve does not heed her questioning.

"I don't think I was ever remarkable for untruths when we were little children at home," she goes on, wistfully. "You don't remember do you, Berry?"

On Berry's conscience the sins of her childhood evidently do not lie with any perceptible heaviness.

"I daresay we were all much the same!" she answers, easily. "I don't know that you were

ever especially distinguished for either virtue or viciousness."

"I have not always been false, and only just now discovered it," persists Eve.

"My dear, come and lie down, and I will bring you your luncheon. You cannot be well to talk so strangely."

"I am not well. I am wretchedly ill and unstrung; but that is no answer to my question."

"I did not think you were speaking seriously."

"I was."

"Then, seriously answering, I have never known you untrue except—except in one instance."

"And that?" faintly.

"In your marriage," answers Berry, gravely; full of pity, and yet obliged to condemn.

"And that is such a long falsehood," says Eve, wearily; "there seems no end to it, and never will be until—until—I die."

"Hush!"

"Why child, you need not look so horrified. Mentioning my decease will not hurry it."

"Indeed, I hope not. Oh! Eve, what have you been doing with my favourite quill?"

"Spoilt it, I am afraid. Never mind there are plenty more. I will keep this one in spite of its shaven and generally undressed appearance as a reminder of a very *mauvais quart d'heure*."

"Highly laudable of you, my dear, and very cheerful," observes Berry, grimly. "Why not have a death's head at luncheon on the same principle? It would be quite a chaste revival of the antique—and antique revivals are so fashionable now."

"By-the-by, luncheon is waiting, I think you said. Shall we go?" says Eve, quickly, resenting the ridicule, and not having the spirit to retort.

"And what is worse—the baby. I heard his voice as I came in here, and he is crying still I think."

"I will go at once. Why did you not tell me before?"

"Your white face put everything else out of my head."

Eve has scarcely been listening to her excuse. A thoughtful look has come into her eyes and her brow is puckered in an anxious frown.

"Do you know, Berry, I sometimes fancy baby is not very strong."

"My dear, you fancy so many things."

"And am right in most. Heaven grant that in this, at least, I may prove wrong!"

She turns away sadly and goes from the room, leaving Berry to wonder whether, after all, she is not the happier of the two. The loveless life which lies before her is free from pitfalls; and had she not chosen it for herself before—before she knew! If she has no hope, she has also no fear, and the memory of what was, and the thoughts of what might have been, are sorrowful sweetness without alloy; not here the blame.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

As with most emotional natures, Eve's feelings lie only on the surface and are not deep as well. For a day or two she is penitent and remorseful, avoiding Ronald as much as may be, and spending most of her time near her baby's cot.

Then, like all other violent revolutions, it brings its own reaction, and she soon relapses into her former habits of indifference to anything but her lover's presence or his absence. The latter so seldom occurs that Berry determines to speak to Ronald himself, and appeal to his manhood not to remain. Surely he will see the danger and consent to go at once before it is too late, and the barriers are swept away that can never, never again be re-erected between the two.

Conquest would be as easy as it would be disgraceful, it seems to her; for Eve, strong enough once to put away the good and choose evil for her own, is only weakest woman now where Ronald is concerned.

Her headstrong will is broken, and her love becomes so dominant a passion that nothing can long stand before it. Wifehood, even motherhood, is forgotten, for the subtle poison creeping

through her veins has dulled her senses to all that is honourable and good.

Love so related gains in intensity and power, like a river pent, which for a time may be restrained and lie in enforced content, but all the while it is seething and boiling with impatience, until, wearied by its importunities the dam breaks at last, then the water leaps from its fretting bondage, and floods the country round, uttering loud moans, that are perhaps protests against the ingenuity of man in breaking nature's laws.

And so with Eve. She fought so long against her ill-starred affection that now she can struggle no more, and is carelessly allowing herself to float with the stream.

It is so pleasant to let her lover linger at her side, whispering insidious sweetnooses, and she has been too long in that pleasure-loving Indian clime to be continuously asking herself whether it is also right. The best has been denied to her; she must 'en take what she can.

But if she is so quiescent, not so Berry. She has gained one concession from her sister, and had hoped that it might have been successful in its results. Putting aside the deepness of her mourning (and her own inclinations, which are even more sombre) she had begged Eve to go out with her into as much of society as the comparatively small station can afford, trusting that what remonstrances cannot effect distraction may. Besides, Eve has too much regard for the proprieties to scandalise them, and Berry's great object is to gain time by keeping them apart. This mad fancy can surely not last for ever.

After all her scheme does not get a fair trial; Mrs. Lee-Brooke by a chance remark precipitating affairs, and bringing them to a crisis.

"Your sister's friend, Mr. May," she had said, in speaking of him, and with so disagreeable an emphasis that Berry is terrified. What if already her sister's name is bandied about and made the subject of shameful gossip?

It is after this that she resolves to improve Ronald to have pity on both and go, but not for some time does an opportunity present itself of seeing him alone, and when it does she is so flustered and nervous at her self-imposed task that she is in danger of losing it.

It is at a garden-party, and all but themselves are engaged in tennis, all except Eve, who never plays these games, and is leaning back in an easy low cane chair, talking to Captain Burdett. Ronald is watching her jealously, and with a haggard look on the face that was so bright and boyish once. He looks years older than he did in the far away time when Eve loved him first.

"After all, it is little more than a year ago," she says, aloud, following a long train of thought. He starts. He had forgotten, or had not noticed her presence.

"I beg your pardon; what did you say, Berry?"

"Was I saying? I thought I was only thinking."

"Thinking of what?"

"Would you care to know?"

"Of course," politely, but with obviously little curiosity.

"Then you shall," she answers, sharply, vexed at his unconcern. "I was wondering how it was you are so altered."

"Am I altered? How?"

"In so many ways!"

"Mention one."

"You are always with Eve now, following her about and haunting her like her shadow. It makes people talk. Why do you do it?"

"It is policy to be on good terms with your Colonel's wife. You cannot blame me for that," he answers uneasily, trying to take her home-thrust as a joke; but she shakes her head incredulously.

"And you come so often to see us," she goes on, feeling more courageous once the ice is broken.

"Is that a fault, too?" laughing.

"Indeed, I think so," gravely.

He turns, and looking into her serious eyes, sees something there that shows him she is in earnest—something, too, of veiled scorn that makes him refrain from further questioning.

"You would make a bad hostess, Berry," he says, with an uncomfortable smile. "When you marry shall you always tell you guests with the same inhospitable frankness that they are unwelcome?"

"I hope I shall not have occasion."

"You have none now!" hotly.

"I wish I could believe it."

Her sad solemnity silences him, and she goes on without interruption.

"Dear Ronald, I cannot bear to see you like this; to know that you are both unhappy—both wrong. I can remember when it seemed as if it might have been so different, but that is all over now, and I cannot stand by quietly without being false myself!"

"False to whom?" he questions nervously, digging his stick into the sandy soil with unnecessary vehemence, and tracing cabalistic forms and figures upon the ground as an excuse for his bent head. He dare not raise it, fearing self-betrayal.

"To Colonel Chester!"

"Ah!" with a deep-drawn sigh, and then suddenly: "Berry, who put this nonsense in your head?"

"No one. I know what I know," she returns with a grand magniloquence that would be amusing were not the occasion of its use so grave; "I know that you loved each other once, and fear that you do so still."

"You may answer for me if you like, but Eve—"

He stops, and she is about to answer, when warned by his eager upward glance she refrains. If he has not already guessed her sister's secret, she must not be the one to tell it.

"Eve has her husband!" she supplements shortly. "You ought not to come between them."

He looks a little ashamed, and is going to reply when Laurence Le Sage joins them.

"How is it you are not playing, Miss Cardell?"

"I have no talent that way, unfortunately."

"Unfortunately, indeed. There is nothing else to be done out here," with a pitying smile at the surrounding pleasure-seekers, who are still vigorously sending tennis balls backwards and forwards with unabated enthusiasm.

"Then I may as well label myself 'useless,' and beg to be returned to my own country at once," says Berry, and laughs as though that would be no great hardship.

"Is it not delightful? Are you not enjoying yourself?" asks Mrs. Lee-Brooke, stopping for a moment beside them. "I think it is delicious here in the hills. I am getting quite gay, and am engaged for every day for a week. Tomorrow we dine with you. Saturday there is the Club dance, Sunday, church—"

"Do you call that an engagement?" asks Captain Burdett, having come up quietly behind.

"Well, no, not exactly," rather confused. "But it is a great thing to have an object for the day."

"A great thing indeed, provided it is for the day only, and is not your wife!" comments the captain, drily, as she passes on with a girlish kiss of her finger tips in farewell.

"What a shame!" scolds Berry, merrily. "She is not so plain!"

"Is she not?" shrugging his shoulders.

"And I have heard you say you hated pretty women!"

"I hate ugly ones worse!"

"Which means a sweeping condemnation of all our sex!"

"Don't you deserve censure?" smiling.

"I don't feel particularly wicked."

"You look it!" meaningly. "It was to protect May that I came over!"

"Very good of you, I'm sure," says Ronald, absently.

"And in the meantime who is to protect Mrs. Chester? You have left her alone. Are you going back, or shall I take your place?" asks young Le Sage, with an air of chivalry.

"You go by all means, Laurence. She will be the gainer!"

But, after all, he does not linger long where he

has elected to stay. He is never a lady's man; and although the two sisters are favourites of his, more especially the younger, even they have not the power to keep him for any time.

Directly they are alone again Ronald recommences,—

"Berry, what do wish me to do?"

"To go away. It is the only honourable thing."

"I believe you are right; but it will be very hard. I have loved her so long and so well."

She is looking at him with such sympathising eyes that he stops short in his chapsodias.

"If you love her, you will leave her," she says with sweet severity.

"It is so easy to talk, but not so easy to do. I tell you, my whole life is at stake!"

"More than that, Ronald—your honour," she interposes, gently.

"Yes, of course. Berry, I wonder if you will ever be in love?"

"Not likely. Why do you ask?"

"Because you are so cold. You would drive a man mad."

"I hope not," quietly.

"Do you know, Berry," he goes on reverting again to his own grievances; "I shall never forgive myself that I did not urge my cause more warmly. I ought to have pleaded again and again, until she did consent. I might have known a woman's 'no' was often 'yes'; but I was such a proud young fool."

"I don't think it would have made much difference," answers the girl, meaning to console, but falling short of her object.

The sun is setting, and the snows are bathed in rosiest light as they stand out warm against a pale horizon; the sky is a mass of what would seem impossible colours placed on English canvas, and viewed by English eyes—an expanse of clear sea-green flecked with little golden spots and tablets of blue from its palest, purest shade, to darkest indigo. And just where Phœbus sinks to rest a confused splash of crimson and purple as though he were leaving his royal robes behind. "The King is dead, long live the King."

The moon is already rising in its stead, although in meeker majesty, shining coldly on the clusters of dark pines and the deep, damp valleys beneath. Slowly, slowly the richer brightness fades, and only silvery beams make radiant the gathering clouds; one by one the stars peep out, and twinkle happily. The grand snow-hills have ceased to bluish and glow, and are perfectly white now, white and still like death.

"How one misses the twilight," says Eve in her soft young voice, as she comes up beside them, her light draperies floating behind her, and her feathery hat encircling her head more like a halo than a merely mortal piece of millinery.

"Let us go home," says Berry quickly, seizing her by the arm, and hurrying her away out of Ronald's sight. What is the good of all her lecturing and common-sense if it is to be upset in a moment by Eve's bewildering beauty. Love is always stronger than reason, and for faces less fair men have died and counted not the cost.

(To be continued.)

THE Burmese have a curious idea regarding coins. They prefer those which have female heads on them, believing that coins with male heads on them are not so lucky, and do not make money.

THE buran, or snow hurricane, of the Pamirs is a meteorological phenomenon of great interest. Even in midsummer the temperature during a snow buran frequently falls to 14 degrees Fahrenheit, while in the winter of 1892-93 it dropped to 45 degrees below zero at the end of January. The buran comes with startling suddenness, the atmosphere growing dark with whirling snowflakes where scarcely a minute before the sky was perfectly clear.

CHRONIC INDIGESTION and its attendant Misery and Suffering Cured with Tonic "Doctor" (purely vegetable), 2/6, from Chelmsford; 3/-, post free from Dr. Hoxar, "Glendower," Bournemouth. Sample bottle and pamphlet, with Analytical Reports, &c., 6 stamps.

## THE PLOT THAT FAILED.

—10:—

(Continued from page 345.)

She left a letter behind her for Hiram, almost the last words she ever addressed to him. It began and ended informally:—

"When you get this I shall be far enough from you, and for the sake of old days I believe you will let me go my way unmolested. That I have broken the law, outraged all ideas of propriety and goodness, I know only too well; but for my sin (if, indeed, it were a sin to try to keep my own) I feel no sorrow, no remorse; my grief is that it should have been discovered."

"I have ruined my life for love; I have lost my name, my home, every hope of good, and all for love! Surely, Hiram Lonsdale, you of all men should pity me! For your sake I lost my integrity, for your sake I would have hounded Winifred Caldecot down, and have felt no ruth."

"With me love and hate are equal passions. Judge, then, what anguish I have borne; my poor heart torn this way by affection for you, the other by hate for her. I believed if I could blacken her name to you, if I could once convict her of a vulgar crime, you would put her wholly out of your thoughts, your life. How I failed you now."

"Every word that Hester Bond spoke was simple truth. I wish I had died before I played the fool and took her into my service. Well, her revenge has been full and complete, and I am too proud to make any outcry."

"You will marry Winifred Caldecot, but I hope, I pray, you will not be happy, that she will never satisfy your ambitious cravings. I could have worked for you, have assisted you materially in all your plans; but you have blindly flown in the face of your own prosperity, and before many months have passed will be weary and ashamed of your country wife."

"I love you; oh! my heart, how I love you! I wish it were otherwise. If it were possible, although it killed me, I would tear out my very heart-strings if so I could uproot my passion! In your happiest hours may my memory be with you; when meat you long to forget me may the thought of my spoiled life, my disgraced name, haunt you and destroy your peace!"

It was a terrible letter, terrible because of its unwomanly hate and vindictiveness. As he read it Hiram saw once more the lovely, haughty face, the imperious eyes, and seemed almost to hear the clear, cold voice uttering the cruel words.

He thrust the letter between the bars and watched it burn, impatiently; then he rose and bent his steps towards the "Jolly Waterman" (since Winifred had been carried there he had taken apartments at the opposition inn). He went upstairs towards the sitting-room, and was confronted by Hester Bond. He felt rather sore against her that she had held her secret until the last; he would have been quite willing to spare Isabel such a public exposure, and he deeply resented the suffering Winifred had so needlessly been made to endure.

"Why could you not tell us all you knew, and prevent the trial?" he asked.

"Because not even for Miss Winifred's sake could I forego my revenge. You don't know all she made me suffer. Perhaps a wretch like me should have had no feeling. I don't know how that may be, but now, if I could, I would undo my work—"

He interrupted her.

"Can I see Miss Caldecot?"

"No, sir, she is very, very ill. Mrs. Wilkins is with her."

And so it proved. For days the girl lay unconscious; now that the strain upon her was over she suddenly collapsed, and the doctor wore a very grave face as he stood beside her bed, looking down on the poor wasted form and fever-bright eyes.

Mrs. Wilkins and Hester were unremitting in their attentions, and between the two women a very real and true affection sprang up.

And at last, one day in April, their labours

were rewarded. Winifred woke to keen and conscious life, and from that hour began to mend.

But the doctor emphatically declared she must have no excitement for many days to come, and absolutely forbade them to admit Hiram to her room; but he gave ready permission to carry her off to Fenwick, trusting that her native air would do much to restore her.

It was the close of a delightful May day, and Winifred sat in the little room Mrs. Wilkins called her parlour, listening to Mrs. Firman's latest schemes for the emancipation of women, when she heard a step on the gravel, and a voice that sent the blood leaping through her veins.

Trembling in every limb she rose, and Mrs. Firman, with greater tact than she was usually supposed to possess, hurried out, meeting Hiram in the little brick-floored entrance.

"So you have come. Ah, well! go into her. I hope you'll make her happy, but I doubt it; men are such weathercocks."

He went in, and saw a frail, shadowy-looking figure in grey, the very ghost of his old Winifred, but his Winifred despite all. He took her gently in his arms, and placed her upon the couch, kneeling down beside her and hiding his face on her breast.

"Dear," he said, in a passionate whisper, "I have come back to you. You will not refuse to forgive me! You will not send me away!"

"Never any more! Oh, never any more!" and then he felt her kisses and her tears fall warm upon his brow. He lifted his head and kissed her once upon the temple.

"Dear," he said, earnestly, "I have much to atone for, and if ever I bring one cloud to your face, one grief to your heart, may I reap my just punishment by losing your dear love."

Once only did Winifred see her quondam rival, and she had then been a happy wife several years; they met at a ball at Milan.

Isabel's beauty had faded wonderfully, and she did not look a contented woman, although she had all her little world at her feet.

She had married an Austrian noble, whose influence at Court was great. He worshipped her, was a slave to her every whim, and she rewarded him by studied coldness and neglect. Chance threw her near Hiram.

"Are you happy?" she whispered, eagerly, and the look on his face answered her more eloquently than words.

She left directly after, and he saw her no more.

Heater Bond emigrated to Canada with the man who, despite her story, loved her and made her his wife, and from time to time Winifred hears pleasant tidings of her.

And Hiram declares often that there is no man on earth so happy as he.

[THE END]

THE deepest hole in the earth is near Kotschau, Germany. It is 5,735 feet in depth, and is for geological research only. The drilling was begun in 1880, and stopped six years later because the engineers were unable with their instruments to go deeper.

BRIGHT-RED spectacles form a new German specific against sea-sickness. It is maintained that sea-sickness is due to lack of blood in the brain, while red sends blood to the brain with a rush. By looking at one point for some time through the red glasses the patient is cured radically.

In Serbia there still survives a wonderful old institution known as the Zadruga. It is the living together of a whole tribe, numbering sometimes as many as 100 persons, all under the absolute authority of one chief. He keeps all the money, makes all purchases, and decides the minutest details of family life.

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfluous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. Houx, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.

## WHAT LIES BEYOND?

—101—

### CHAPTER XIX.

FROM whence had Rob Foster come! How had he gained ingress to the library at Sea View!

These questions gradually evolved themselves from the labyrinthine network of chilling fear which surrounded Mona as effectually in its intangibility as though she were encased in steel withers.

There was a full minute's breathless silence; then his voice, so changed, so hoarse, as to be almost unrecognisable, broke the spell:

"I want food and drink, girl; I am starving. Drink first, food after!"

Then his glance wandered to a little table within reach, on which was set a supper for her own use, and a pitcher filled to the brim with ice-water.

The latter he clutched, and, raising it to his lips with ravenous greed, drained it. Then he fell upon the food. In scarce five minutes, every remnant of it had disappeared; but the time thus gained had restored to Mona something of her shattered calm.

When he returned to her side she forced herself to shake off the deadening influence which forbade both thought and action.

"I want more," he growled, though in a low voice. "More—you hear me!—and every night the same until they ease the hunt a little, when I'll escape them all. What makes you so white, girl! Don't faint! Did you think it was one of the Raymond ghosts! Ha, ha!"

And he laughed, though still under his breath—a mocking laugh, which at such a time and in such a place was more terrible than the laugh from spectral throat.

"Don't father—don't!" she pleaded, her own voice sounding very strange to her, and glancing as she spoke towards Bernard French, the sick man.

Then his gaze followed hers, and rested where it fell with basilisk intensity. Step by step he glided from her side towards the bed. Roused by terror into action, she sprang after him and clutched his arm.

"Father, he is dying!" she gasped.

"It is well," he answered. "Villain! traitor! spy! But for him, I would be free to-day—free, instead of waiting, hungry and thirsty, with one of their bullets in my leg."

She noted then, for the first time, that he dragged one leg after him as he walked.

"I told you I was waiting until the hunt should ease a little! But for this," striking the wounded limb, "I could escape them in their hottest search. And but for him I would stand to-day unsuspected and a free man. I've a mind to choke him as he lies."

"Make one step nearer him, and, by the Heavens above, I will shriek aloud for help," she replied, looking him fearlessly in the eyes. "Aye, one single step. Have you not done enough? Is it not your knife which has laid him low! He is dying. Let him die in peace!"

"Yes, he is dying," Rob Foster, cooed. "But for that my grip would close about his throat—aye, though I swung for it to-morrow! But the death-sweat is already on his brow. I have seen it too often gather not to recognise it now. My trusty steel has done the work for him; and the devil, when claiming him, will whisper my name in his ear as the man who sent him to his doom."

Mona shuddered. How dreadful it all was! Then, still feeling the chilling wind, she glanced behind her, and saw, for the first time, how her father had entered the room.

A panel, she had always supposed immovable, had swung back, revealing a long, black passage, from up which came the dank air she had felt.

In an instant it all flashed upon her. This was the secret entrance made by the long dead Raymond, discovered by the smugglers, and converted by them to their own base uses.

She remembered now her father's words, uttered so long ago: "The Sea-View ghosts will

rise and walk." Ah, little had she dreamed their hidden meaning.

"Yes," he said, following her glance with his. "You know now how I came here, and how I will come again. Until my leg is well, I must stay hounded in this cave; but no longer with my throat parched and a thousand starving demons within me. You shall provide me with food and drink, and if I don't come to you, then you must come with them to me."

Unconsciously his voice was rising.

"Hush, father—hush!" she implored, with a warning glance toward the next room.

"Some one there, eh! Well, listen to me, and see to it that you obey my every word. I'm going to fly from this place just as soon as I get well and strong, but it won't be safe for me to go to the hut, and there's one or two things there that I must have and that I want you to bring me. In the left-hand corner of the fireplace is a brick with a black stain in the centre. If you put a wedge under it, it will come out. Behind it, in a hollow, is a small box, locked. I have the key. That box I want, Get it to-morrow, and in the night I will return for it here. You hear! You understand!"

"Yes, father—yes; but I will not be permitted to watch alone to-morrow night. Suppose you are discovered! Wait a few days. The first night that I am alone I will rap upon the panel very gently, but you will hear, and then you will know that it is safe."

"No, no, the young villain may go to his account before many to-morrow, and I've no time to lose. Make what excuse you will to watch, but watch alone. And now, before I go, get me something more to eat."

The girl wrung her hands in despair.

"I can't, father! The family are all wakeful and watchful. Suppose they discover me prowling about in the night, or that Mr. Ayre enters while I am gone!"

"Suppose I suppose!" the man echoed, sneeringly. "I'm dealing in facts, not suppositions. Suppose you tell them you're hungry, and in search of food; and suppose you let Mr. Ayre and me settle it between ourselves. If he interferes. Go, I say! and bring me enough, too. I'll play nurse in your absence."

All Miss Mayhew's plans had gone wrong. It seemed as though the sacrifice of Bernard French's life had been in vain. He might never even recover to question the avowed treachery of his friend, and Alton Ayre's manner to the fisher-girl had but gained in tenderness and respect.

Something more must be done. Kate must bring the disgrace nearer and nearer Mona, until the girl was hopelessly sunk in the foul swamp of its reality. In some way she must fasten upon Mona the suspicion of guilt so strongly that it would be taken for guilt itself.

No wonder that these thoughts banished sleep, or that she lay tossing and restless upon her bed. She was half-tempted, so long as slumber refused to come at her bidding, to go down to the sick room and offer to relieve Mona. It would look generous and disinterested.

Yes, she would do it. Neither had she forgotten that it had been arranged that Alton Ayre was to be within call. Perhaps he, too, was passing a sleepless night. At any rate, uncertainty should become certainty.

Ten minutes later, in a most becoming wrapper, she softly opened her door, and emerged from her dressing-room into the dimly-lighted hall.

At the head of the stairs she stopped, and took one step backward. Mona in that moment had opened the library-door, to obey her father's commands.

Mona's heart beat as she glanced up and down the hall. Yet the moments were precious. She dared not leave her father long alone with the sick man, lest his hatred should get the better of his prudence.

Then, too, at any instant Alton Ayre might waken, and come in to see how her charge was doing. Bitterly as she loathed her appointed task, it must be quickly performed, so she hastened on into the dining-room.

Five minutes later she emerged, bearing wine and food; but during these five minutes, Miss

Mayhew's light feet had descended the stairs, step by step, and as Mona passed back the light blue eyes were peering at her from behind a portiere.

Seeing nothing, Mona entered the library, but scarcely had the door closed than one steel-blue eye was at the keyhole, blazing and scintillating, as the interior of the room was revealed.

"I thought you were never coming," growled Rob Foster. "He's not too pleasant company to be shut up alone with," indicating the unconscious sufferer with his glance. "But I must be going. Don't forget, girl, to-morrow night, and be sure you bring the box. Don't fail me!"

"I won't fail, father," Mona answered, in weak, faint tones, feeling her strength desert her, as the strain upon her relaxed.

A minute later, the panel swung to beheld him. She was again alone. Surely it all had been a frightful dream. But, no! to-morrow it must come again.

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" she said to herself in low, weary accents, while a voice outside the door, of whose tones she heard nothing, repeated the words, in low, triumphant malice: "To-morrow! to-morrow! Ah, Mona Foster, to-morrow your defeat and your triumph will be assured!"

And, with a little, low, thrilling laugh of mocking glee, Kate Mayhew ran lightly up the stairs, back to her room, and to her soft, luxurious bed; but this time to close her eyes in sweetest slumber.

Why not? She had but to stretch out her hand to victory, and to wait for it only till to-morrow!

## CHAPTER XX.

ALTON AYRE'S heart smote him, as, rousing from slumber, in the pale dawn's early light, he came into the sick-room and saw the white suffering face which lay so quietly back among the dark cushions of the chair in which the slight form seemed lost.

The grey eyes had in them a look he had never seen in their depths before as Mona turned them upon him—a look of mute, despairing, but unconscious pathos.

"My poor Mona!" he said, gently drawing nearer to her side, and taking in his warm clasp one little, trembling hand. It was cold as marble, and he saw that her whole body shook, as though in a powerful chill. "You are utterly exhausted!"

He turned toward the table on which the supper had been set, expecting to find it untouched. To his surprise, it was swept clean.

"You have eaten; I am glad of that," he said; "but you have watched too long. How selfish we all have been to let you do it!"

"No, no!" she whispered. "I want to watch—to watch alone again to-night."

As though utterance was difficult to her, she dragged out the words one by one.

But what was she saying! This was not the way to effect her purpose.

"I meant," she began, "that it is not she watching that has tired me so."

"What then, Mona—what then, my poor little girl!"

His tender tone was more than she could bear. Tears which found their way so rarely to the grey eyes now forced their way through the flood-gates of her utter misery. They fell, great, scalding drops, coursing down her cheek, unwiped, unnoted.

Upward from the delicate throat came the choking sobs. The long-repressed wretchedness had burst its bonds; but her hands were tightly locked together, now that she had withdrawn the one he held, and the fingers closely interlaced. It was a pitiable sight, and Alton Ayre felt his own eyes moisten. How should he comfort her! There was but one way, and Kate Mayhew had spoken truly when arguing his pride of birth.

Little by little, the truth was forcing itself upon him, that he had given his heart into the keeping of this fisher-girl—that she asserted over him, all unconsciously, a power no woman

had ever asserted before; but was he quite prepared to offer her not only his protection but his home? To extend the one without the other never for one instant crossed the horizon of his noble thought; and now in this moment of her utter weakness the one barrier between them fell.

"Mona," he whispered, "look up, my love! Take comfort. You shall never be alone again, if you will come to my arms. I may teach you to love me, my own—ah, my very own—my wife!"

Softly, tenderly the last word fell from his lips. Down, down it found its way to her poor, suffering heart, with its wonderful healing. His wife! Had she heard aright! She had thought, perhaps, to divert him a moment from Miss Mayhew's side, to throw over him the momentary spell which youth and beauty wears; but that he should stoop from the pedestal of his noble manhood to lift her to a place beside him—to give to the poor fisher-girl a dower a princess might envy, the dower of his love—oh, this was glorious madness, which for the instant barred from her quivering soul its own undoing. But for an instant only! Then the waters swept over her blacker than before—so black that they hid from her anguished sight the rainbow hues he just had painted.

"You would marry me—me!" she faltered. "Oh, no! It can never, never be!"

"And why, Mona?—tell me why? Is it because you love Bernard! If so, it is well. I love you so well that to make your happiness I could even give you up to him—that is, poor fellow, if he lives to accept the royal gift. It is for him you mourn thus? Tell me, Mona. Do not fear to be frank with me."

Ah, if frankness were but possible! If she could but fall at his feet and tell him all the wretched story, how the weight would roll away which was crushing her! If she had but done so—if she had but obeyed the first almost irrepressible impulse—how much suffering, poor girl, would have been saved her!

"You thought I loved Mr. French? Oh, no, no!" she moaned.

"Then, darling," he cried, in tones of triumph, "you shall love me! I will never despair of teaching you the lesson—never while there is life and hope. Poor Bernard! I wish to gain no mean advantage of him in the race; but I fear he may never live to run for it, and I fancy even so he may be consoled. In any case, darling, I must think first and only of you. Look at me, Mona, with the wonderful eyes which in their first glance pierced their way into my heart-depths. Sometimes I have fancied that they held a little gleam which might mean love for me. Was it only fancy, Mona?"

It were as though some mocking angel were taunting her with the open gates of Paradise. Her tears ceased, but the sobs rent her cruelly, and she now bowed her head upon her hands; but gently he took them both in his one hand, while with the other he drew her to him, and laid her tired head upon his breast.

For a moment she let it rest there. It was so sweet—so sweet! She could never again be wholly wretched, she thought. The exquisite happiness of this moment must lighten all her life. But what was she doing? Pity only had actuated this man—it could be no other motive. With sudden strength she wrenched herself from his embrace and sprang upon her feet.

"Do not mock me!" she cried. "Do you know what I am, that you should ask me to become your wife! What would you say to your friends when they questioned you of the girl you had married! Do you imagine that Miss Mayhew would keep silent! No, no! I should see the red flush of shame on your cheeks, and know it burned there for me. I should see your eyes flash, and know that it was anger for my sake. I should watch you keep silent in your true loyalty, while your heart was bursting at the fate into which your madness had led you. They would say, too, that I had plotted, schemed to win you. They would wonder at the mad infatuation which possessed you to pass by the queen of roses which brushed their fragrant

dewy petals against your hand in passing, wooing you to pluck them, and led you to stoop to the poor little weed growing in the shadow of the deadly nightshade. You think I would not see it—know it!"

Until now, he had been striving in vain to check the torrent of her speech. The words, in all their passionate intensity, had burst from her quivering lips in unrestrained force.

"Mona!" he said, at last, in tender reproach.

Only the utterance of her name, but it quieted and calmed her.

She raised to his face the grey eyes, only to read there the masterful strength, the gentle firmness, which had ever swayed her.

"Mona," he repeated, "is our happiness each for the other, or for the world!"

"Ah, but you would not be happy!" she said sadly. "Remember, it is your world, not mine. Once I might have stretched out to you clean hands. Now they are tainted by disgrace—the disgrace of a father's sin!"

And, as she spoke, she extended her arms with passionate pain.

He caught the little fingers in his clasp, and with royal grace, stooped to press upon them fervent kisses.

"Dear little white hands!" he whispered.

She strove to free them, but he would not let them go.

At that instant the sun burst from behind its imprisoning bank of clouds, and shed a flood of golden glory upon them where they stood.

"The night has passed," he said. "My darling, we are in the morning—the morning of our love—for which, pray Heaven, there shall be no night."

Nearer and nearer, with gentle, irresistible force he drew her to him. Her disgrace, her misery, her wretched life, all lay behind her. Oh, might she not accept this one exquisite moment as a promise of the future!

She smiled up at him through a mist of tears. His smile, grave and tender, and true, answered it. Softly he held back her head, on whose golden-brown crown the sunbeams played at will, until the trembling lips, with their rich crimson stain, were close to his own, which stooped to meet them. Then, held tightly in his arms, the gentle pressure of his lips thrilled her, awakening within her the consciousness of love, which roused from its slumber, might never return to its dull lethargic torpor.

"My love! my love!" she murmured.

"My love!" he answered; when something roused them—a sound, a sigh.

It came from the bed. They started apart, but too late. The man who for three days had lain unconscious, had half lifted himself from his pillow. His eyes, wide open and mad with fury, were fixed upon Alton Ayre's face.

"Traitor!" he said, with clear distinctness between his clenched teeth. "Traitor!" he repeated, then fell back.

Mona sprang to his side. Again he lay white and unconscious upon his pillow, the blood streaming forth anew from his ghastly wound. In vain she strove to staunch it.

"Help, help!" she cried. "Oh, Heaven, we have killed him!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

FOR a time they thought Mona's words were all too true. Twice the doctor, hastily summoned, bent his head to note if Bernard French's life was extinct; but at last the crimson tide, bearing away his young life, was checked. With absolute quiet he might yet recover.

Claire was utterly unnerved with grief, as she wandered about from room to room, helpless and hopeless.

Mona exhausted, had been forced to rest; but she could only lie with wide-open eyes upon her pillow. Sleep resolutely forsook her. One problem agitated her brain. How should she watch alone again to-night?

Mercifully the doctor had decreed that but one person should be in the sick-room at a time; but if she volunteered, she knew that Alton

Ayre would interpose his authority. She had had no time or opportunity for word with him since the dreadful moment of Mr. French's singular awakening.

Was it not all a delusion of her own fancy? Certainly it seemed so—but no. Again she could hear her father's commands, that she should watch alone; but—there was something else, something she had forgotten. She was to bring him the box concealed at the hut. At any hazard she must get possession of this box. The afternoon was growing late, too. There was no time to be lost.

Rising, though with swimming brain, she hastily resumed her dress, and watching her opportunity, when the silent halls were deserted, went from the house. As she passed out she met Miss Mayhew entering. Both started guiltily at sight of the other.

"Oh, Miss Foster," exclaimed Kate. "I was just thinking of you. I have offered to sit up to-night with poor Mr. French, as I am the only one in the house who is at all fresh, and so little is to be done; but I never kept awake all night in my life, and I am frightened to death at the responsibility. I was just coming to ask your advice as to what I should do."

Mona's heart lightened. This dilemma of Miss Mayhew's seemed providential.

"If you will keep watch until one o'clock, I will relieve you then, on the condition that you tell no one of my intention," she answered. "I really am stronger than they believe, but Claire might interfere if she knew I intended watching again."

"I promise you to say nothing; but, really, I know I have not been always polite, and I hate to take advantage of your generosity."

Mona frankly extended her hand.

"We have not been friends," she said; "but this is not the time to harbour resentment."

An instant the blonde touched the tips of the little fingers. She stood motionless long after Mona had passed from sight.

"You are afraid Claire will interfere, eh?" she sneered. "As though Claire knew or cared for anything but the question of Bernard French's life or death. Ha, ha, my lady! I know whose interference you fear. After to-night you need fear nothing. My plans have worked well. At twelve o'clock I admit the lieutenant and his men, whom I have warned by an anonymous communication that the whereabouts of the smuggler may thereby be discovered, and his daughter detected as aiding and abetting not only his concealment but his crime. Her arrest and imprisonment will follow. Let me see Alton Ayre if you will love her well enough to follow her to a convict's cell! How eagerly she snatched at my proposal to watch to-night. What a weight of apprehension it has lifted from her mind! Will she suspect me, I wonder! No! I have laid my plans too well!"

And, with a cunning smile of satisfaction, she tripped lightly past the room where, perhaps, lay a dying man, giving him neither thought nor prayer!

At the head of the stairs she met Alton Ayre. "You watch to-night, Miss Mayhew?" he said, courteously. "Can I not relieve you? I have been sleeping, and am quite rested now."

"You are very good," she answered. "Yes," I take my turn to-night. I only dread the loneliness. If you would consent to sleeping again in the nurse-room, that I might call you if there was any sudden change, I should be very grateful. Only that I may know someone is within reach of my voice."

"Certainly I will do so," he responded. "How very kind you are!" she exclaimed. "I most earnestly trust, not only for his own sake, poor fellow, but for Miss Foster's, that Mr. French's life may be spared."

"And why for Miss Foster's, particularly?" Alton questioned.

"Did you not know that she had promised to marry him?" Kate answered, in surprised tones. "Or, at least, he told me that it was an understood thing between them. Certainly no other motive would have induced her to warn him against her own father."

"But she did not warn him."

"No? I heard that she had written Mr. French a note of warning; then hoping to save her father's life, sent him one also, which her mother, not knowing its meaning, had withheld. It's all an intricate affair. I don't attempt to fathom it. Of course, a girl in her position cannot have real delicacy of feeling. I should not be surprised if she had known of this smuggling from the beginning."

"Hush!" said Alton, sternly. "The girl is as innocent as you of any knowledge of her father's crime."

"Perhaps," retorted the blonde, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I met her just now on her way to the hut. She looked strangely excited and ill at ease, I thought."

"He will follow her," she asserted, under her breath; and laughed, as a minute later, she heard the front door softly close behind him. "I have sown the seed," she added, "she must reap the harvest."

Meantime Mona had entered the hut. She shivered as she crossed the threshold. Her mother sat rocking to and fro, lifting to her a white, wan face of wretchedness.

"So you're come at last," Mrs. Foster said. "Is your lover dead?"

"My lover!" answered the girl. "What do you mean?"

"I mean the man who betrayed your poor old father. Curse him and his gold! I pray each piece he ever paid may weigh his soul down into eternity!"

"Mother," wailed Mona, "don't talk like that. And listen—I have something to tell you! Father is going to escape. I saw him last night."

"You—saw—him—last—night!"

One by one, in her amazement, the woman forced out the words.

Then Mona, kneeling beside her, told her all the story, rapidly and concisely.

"I must take him the box to-night, mother," Mona concluded. "It is a fearful risk, but I think all will be well."

"So this is where he has kept it all these years," the woman kept saying over and over to herself, as though forgetful of any present danger in far-off memories. "All these years, and he never once disclosed it to me. It's glass, old woman—only glass," he would tell me. Why, then, does he want it? What can he do with shining, glittering glass? 'It's for the child's sake I keep it,' he would say. Is it for the child's sake now, I wonder? Mona, what more did he tell you—of yourself, child—of yourself?"

"Of myself, mother! What could there be to tell me of myself!"

"Enough, enough!" the woman replied. "And it's time you knew. Come to me to-morrow and you shall know."

"Not to-morrow, mother! To-day—now! Somehow I cannot look forward until to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Mrs. Foster again repeated. "I cannot think it out to-night."

With hungry eyes she watched Mona following the fisherman's directions to find the box. Then she took it in her own hands, turning it over and over as she restored it to the girl.

"It's full of glass—glittering glass!" she half-whispered. "Take care of it. Put it safe into your father's hands."

Mona looked with tender pity at the worn, weather-beaten face she had seen so many years in its stolid impassiveness.

Had the poor brain turned under its weight of misery?

"To-morrow, mother," she said, gently.



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And, fastening the box safe in the bosom of her dress, she hurried from the hut.

At the foot of the cliff Alton Ayre met her. Her eyes fell beneath his frank, loving gaze, and the blush of shame burned on her cheek.

He noted her confusion, and remembered—hating himself for the memory—Miss Mayhew's words.

"Where have you been, Mona?" he questioned. "I have been to the hut—to my home," she answered, with bitter meaning. "Mr. Ayre," she added, with sudden impulse, "last night was all a mistake; I can never marry you!"

To-morrow she was to learn something more concerning herself. What could it be save some new stain upon her name? To-night, she was to betray the confidence of her friend, and hold a secret meeting with a criminal. That the criminal was her father but dyed deeper her disgrace.

So she looked bravely into her lover's face, and uttered the words she meant as her final farewell.

He opened his lips to answer, but she checked him with a mute appeal, and in silence they approached the house.

(To be continued.)

## FACETIE.

HAVE a cigar!" "No, I've given up smoking." "When does the wedding take place?"

SAVER: "Did you get any credit for saving her life?" Braver: "No—cash."

TOM: "I don't know whether she sings or not." Jack: "She doesn't; I heard her."

WIFE: "George, do the American Indians always travel in single file?" Husband: "I never saw but one and he did."

DOCTOR, where did you get that beautiful scarf-pin?" "From my first patient." "Inheritance?"

SUITH: "Papa, what makes a man always give a woman a diamond engagement-ring?" Her father: "The woman."

SHOPMAN (to shop-lad): "Just bring in those waterproofs. It is snowing, and I don't want them damaged!"

"ANOTHER daughter off your hands," smiled Mrs. Grims. "Another son-in-law to keep," growled Mr. Grims.

FRIEND: "How do you get along with the cooking?" Bride: "Admirably! I blame it on the range."

"I DON'T see your mistletoe," said he, glancing up at the chandelier. "Is it really necessary?" replied she, archly. It wasn't.

"So Alice has decided finally to marry an officer!" "Yes; she captured him in what she positively declares to be her last engagement."

"No, thank you! I've got some money of my own," said Tommy, politely, when the plate was handed to him at church.

HARRY (quoting): "If thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool." Mable: "O Mr. Lighthouse, this is so sudden!"

"We are getting up a Klondyke club." "When do you go?" "We're not going at all; we are organising to keep one another from going."

"BRIDGET, does your mistress assist you in cooking?" "Yes; very much." "How does she do it?" "By kaping out of the kitchen."

OLD GENTLEMAN: "Weren't you kissing my daughter when I came in?" Young Man: "Yes, sir. Have you no apology to make for your intrusion?"

MAGISTRATE: "I think it was a very cheeky and impertinent thing to break into this house in the middle of the day." Prisoner: "I could not go at night, as I had another engagement."

ANXIOUS PASSENGER: "I say, my man, is that boat going up or down?" Riverside Locomotive: "Well, she's a leaky old tub, so I shouldn't wonder if she was goin' down; then, again, her bilers ain't none too good, so she might go up!"

CUSTOMER: "Are my clothes ready?" Tailor: "Not yet, sir." Customer: "But you said you would have them done if you worked all night." Tailor: "Yes; but I didn't work all night."

TEACHER: "What do we learn from the story of Samson?" Tommy (with unpleasant results still manifest): "That he doesn't pay ter have women folks cut a feller's hair."

"So you've lost all your marbles, eh? Well, it serves you right. Boys always lose who play on Sundays." "But how about the other feller who won all my marbles?"

MOTHER: "I cannot allow you to play with those naughty children, Willie. They are rough and rude." Willie: "But you don't mind my fighting with them, do you?"

NURSE GIRL: "I lost sight of the child, mum, and—" Mother: "Good gracious! Why didn't you speak to a policeman?" Nurse Girl: "I was speaking to wun all the tims, mum."

"YOU'RE my first and only love," he declared. "I can believe you," she answered with a shiver, for they were sitting at least ten feet apart.

LANDLADY: "Don't be afraid of the meat, Mr. Jones." Jones (a new boarder): "I'm not afraid of it. I've seen twice as much meat, and it didn't frighten me a bit."

DEPOSITOR: "Is the cashier here?" Bank-manager: "N-o, he's gone away." Depositor: "Ah, gone for a rest, I presume?" Bank-manager (slyly): "N-o, to avoid arrest."

OLD farmer Jones (who has been to a local cattle show, and seen a horseless carriage for the first time): "Mooher carah may be all very well—(hic)—but they can't find 'er way home by 'emselves!"

MR. SCRIBBLES (indignantly): "Sir, I have just discovered that your son has engaged himself to two of my daughters." Mr. Grubbs (stupefied): "The young rascal! He should be compelled to marry them both."

FIRST WORKER (gloomily): "Women are crowding into every department of industry and lowering our wages." Second Worker: "I ain't afraid of 'em." First Worker: "You're not? What are you?" Second Worker: "A cook."

LODGER: "I wish you would put another mattress on my bed." Landlady: "Why, that's a genuine hair mattress you have." Lodger: "Well, perhaps it was once, but it's baldheaded now."

"WHAT'S the matter with the Chinese Emperor?" Inquired Li Hung Chang. "Oh, he's sulking again," answered the Empress Dowager. "He says his latest obituary notice wasn't nearly complimentary enough."

AGRICULTURIST (to season-ticket holder in train): "You don't have no ticket?" Season Ticket Holder: "No; I travel on my good looks." Agriculturist (after critically looking him over): "Then probably you ain't goin' very far!"

HOUSEHOLDER (Boxing-night): "Why, you'd better knock the door down! What do you want?" Reveller: "Don't let me wake any of your family. I'm just using your knocker to wake the people next door. I'm locked out, d'ye see, and they have no knocker."

SYMPATHETIC ACQUAINTANCE: "So sorry to hear of your terrible loss, sir—house burned down and wife's mother consumed in the flames! Dreadful! Dreadful!" Mr. Ben Israel: "Yeth, bad blineth. But there ain't any loth, y'know. They wath both fully insured!"

So Gwendolyn is not going to marry the French marquis after all? "No, poor man! He tried to tell her that her slaving was something that made one glad to live, but what he really said was that it made him glad to 'leave,' so Gwen requested him to do so."

The flowing reporter who wrote with reference to a well-known belle, "Her dainty feet were encased in shoes that might be taken for fairy boots," tied his wardrobe up in a handkerchief, and left for parts unknown when it appeared the next morning. "Her dirty feet were encased in shoes that might be taken for ferry boats."

AVERAGE WOMAN: "How am I to know which is poison ivy and which isn't?" AVERAGE MAN: "By looking at it, of course. How else would you know? One has three leaves and the other five. Every man of sense knows that, and I don't see why women shouldn't." "Yes, I know, my dear, but which kind is the poison kind?" "Why, you goosey, the three leaf, of course, or the five-leaf, I forget which."

MRS. SLIMDIET: "You are not eating your meat, Mr. Hallroom." New Boarder: "Er—the fact is, Mrs. Slimdiet, my—er—teeth are not very good, and this meat seems a trifle tough to me." Mrs. S: "Well, that's too bad. Such a time as I do have getting good meat. I have tried every place I can think of." Mr. H: "Have you tried any of the places near the lohn?"

"NOBODY can learn all there is worth knowing in this lifetime," said Mr. Meekton, wisely, "and a man ought never to assume that his education is finished. I'm going to keep right ahead with mine; I'm going to study astronomy." His wife looked at him sharply, and then in a cold, hard tone exclaimed, "Leonidas, you'll have to think up some better excuse than that for staying out all night."

TEACHER (to new girl): "Now Dolly, I'll give you a sum. Supposing that your father owed the butcher fifteen pounds, eleven shillings and two-pence-half-penny; seven pounds, three shillings to the bootmaker; fourteen pounds and ninepence to the milkman; and thirty-one pounds, nineteen shillings and threepence three-farthings to the coal merchant—" Dolly (confidently): "We should move!"

"WHAT is a flirt?" asked the small boy. "A flirt," replied the old bachelor, "is a pretty woman." "But what kind of a pretty woman?" persisted the small boy. "Any kind of a pretty woman," answered the bachelor. "Well, how pretty must she be?" the youngster insisted. "Oh, pretty enough to have a chance to flirt," returned the old bachelor, irritably. And still the boy was not satisfied, but as he grows older he will understand it better.

He was an actor whom his fellow-comedians made the butt of their pleasantries. Finally the other evening they carried their persecutions too far, and with noble rage he cried: "Gentlemen, this has got to stop; this thing has gone too far. I will allow no one to take such liberties with me. Here I have been playing comic parts for the last thirty years, and no one has ever dared to laugh at my acting, and I won't stand it from you—there!"

COLOUR SERGEANT of Highland company (in which were one or two English) calling the roll: "Argus Mackay!" No reply. Louder: "Argus Mackay!" Still no reply. (Sotto voice): "I ken ye're there; yer aye as yer jooty, decent mon, but ye're ower modest to speak before aae mony folk. I see ye fine." Marks him down in roll. "John Jones!" Squeaky voice replies: "'Ere." Sergeant: "Oo, sy, ye're aye here, or say ye're here, but ye're sic a muckle leas I canna believe a word that comes out o' yer mouth, aae I'll jist mark ye down as absent!"



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## SOCIETY.

SINCE the recent alterations in Osborne Park the Queen can drive for about eight miles without leaving her own demesne, so that there is as much privacy there as at Balmoral.

THE Duke of Coburg is to arrive at Clarence House from Germany about the beginning of February, and will stay in London for a month, proceeding afterwards to the Riviera. When he comes to England the Duchess will go to St. Petersburg for a few weeks. The Duke will pay a visit to the Queen at Osborne directly after his arrival in England.

It is stated at the Russian Court that preparations are being made for a visit next spring of the Tsar to Siberia, in order personally to see the progress made by his pet scheme, the great Trans-Siberian Railway, and investigate for himself the conditions of the Siberian prisons, in the amelioration of which the Tsarina is particularly deeply concerned.

KING OSCAR, has at his own expense, caused a deaf and dumb man to be treated under a certain system of massage of throat, ears, and the surrounding parts of the head, advocated by a great Swedish surgeon, with the result that the lucky patient has begun to speak and can hear.

THE apartments for the Queen at the Hôtel Excelsior Regina at Clives have been engaged from March 1st, and that Her Majesty may be expected on Thursday, the 9th, and will stay five or six weeks. The Queen will travel, as usual, across the Channel to Cherbourg, and thence direct to Nice. She will leave about April 18th, and may possibly proceed to Coburg, and may also visit Darmstadt, but I do not think these visits very probable.

THE Tsar is a man of moral courage. He has had a room papered entirely with caricatures of himself. He gave orders that a collection of all caricatures of his Royal self that had appeared in foreign journals should be procured; and he is delighted with his scheme. Few great men could stand such a test; and only a phenomenal sense of humour and a sturdy self-respect, liberally flavoured with genial tolerance for other men's views, could enable a man to be happy in a room papered with caricatures of himself.

ONE of the first Christmas gifts to the Tsarina of Russia was a shawl from some skilled women weavers in the quaint town of Orenburg, in South-Eastern Russia. It is ten yards square, but of such exquisitely fine material that when folded up the parcel is but a few inches square. It can be passed through a lady's ring, so delicate is the texture. The box in which this spider's web fabric was enclosed was of wood, the hinges of beaten silver, and the fastenings (the most primitive hooks and buttons imaginable) also of beaten silver.

THE Queen contemplates promulgating a new set of regulations for the Drawing Rooms and Levées. At present there can be only two hundred presentations at a Drawing Room, but no limit is placed upon the number of ladies attending it. It is probable that in future the attendance will also be limited to a fixed number, and that an intimation will be made that ladies are not expected to come to Court oftener than once in two years. This rule will not of course apply to ladies who attend officially, as it were, such as wives of Ministers and so forth. There will also be a limit to the numbers of both presentations and attendances at the Levées, and a regulation that private persons are expected to come to Court only once in two years. The necessity for a rule of this kind, applicable to both Drawing Rooms and Levées, has been very apparent for some years past.

THERE is a rumour that the Kaiser would not object to an alliance between the Crown Prince and the Duke of Coburg's youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, who at present is but fifteen. As the Crown Prince is only seventeen, there is plenty of time for due consideration of the matter.

## STATISTICS.

AN ordinary elephant produces one hundred and twenty pounds of ivory.

It is estimated that more gold and silver have been sunk in the sea than are now in circulation in the whole world.

A SALMON has been known to produce 10,000,000 eggs. Some female spiders produce 2,000 eggs, while a queen bee produces 100,000 eggs in a season.

THERE are now thirty-four centenarians in Europe, of whom twenty-three are women. Statistics show that for every two male centenarians living during the last ten years, there have always been three females over one hundred years of age.

## GEMS.

GREAT thoughts are the first essential of eloquence.

CAUTION is often wasted, but it is a very good risk to take.

IMAGINATION is the stairway which the mind uses when taking the measure of some lofty projection.

THE art of putting men in the right places is the highest in the science of government, but that of finding places for the discontented is the most difficult.

ALL brave men are brave in initiative; but the courage which enables them to succeed where others dare not even attempt is never so potent as when it leads to entire self-forgetfulness.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SPICED BEEF TO COOK.—Have your beef salted enough, then wash it and put it into plenty of hot (not boiling) water, when it has boiled five minutes draw it to the side of the fire and keep it boiling gently till ready; it takes a quarter of an hour to each pound, and half an hour over.

COOKIES.—Half-pound flour, two ounces butter, two ounces sugar, one large teaspoonful baking powder, one egg, milk; rub the butter among the flour, add sugar and baking powder, beat up the egg and add some milk; pour this in among the flour and make a soft dough; take this and make into little balls, brush over with beaten egg, dust sugar over, and bake about ten minutes in a quick oven.

COLD WATER STARCH.—Three tablespoonfuls of starch in a basin, put in a full teacup of cold water and mix it smooth; then put into the cup one teaspoonful of borax and one teaspoonful of melted white soap, and two teaspoonfuls of turpentine; mix all this together with a good half-teacup of boiling water, and pour it in among the rest of the starch, mixing well; in this wash the linen you are to iron, and wring it dry in a towel; fold and clap and then iron; your iron should be hot and clean and it won't stick.

COOKIES MADE WITH YEAST.—One pound of flour, one ounce German yeast, one egg, one large teacup milk, two ounces butter, one tablespoonful sugar; put the flour in a basin, melt the butter in a jelly pan, and add the milk, this will make the milk a little warm; put the yeast in a bowl, and add the sugar to it; mix it smooth, pour all the warm milk among it, and then the beaten egg; now pour all this among the flour and mix smooth; cover over the basin and stand in a warm place to rise for half an hour; after that take little bits and make them round, and put them on a greased oven shelf and set to rise ten minutes longer; brush over with beaten egg, and put in the oven to bake a few minutes; the dough must be very soft.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

IN Chinese cities streets are never built straight, from a superstitious fear that processions of evil spirits might otherwise enter and remain.

FLORIDA housewives use oranges instead of soap in scrubbing floors. They cut the fruit in two and rub the pulp on the floor. It is found to be very cleansing.

VIENNA telephone girls are required to change their dress and wear a uniform when on duty, as the dirt they bring in from the streets affects the instruments.

A SMALL piece of paraffin wax, which melts and spreads in an air-tight layer over the surface of the liquid, is found by a German chemist to prevent change in the taste of milk on boiling.

SOLDIERS are despised in China. They belong chiefly to the coolie classes. The German officers engaged some time ago by the Chinese Government found that their most important task was to overcome the soldiers' own feeling that they were a lower order of beings than other Chinamen.

IN the early days of the treatment of plants with electric light, the light would sometimes be kept on so long that the plants were prevented from sleeping, and the result in the case of perennials would be to greatly weaken their constitution. The symptoms were analogous to those which would be exhibited in human subjects under the same treatment. It is noteworthy that all the functions of plants can be arrested by the application of chloroform or a weak solution of opium or other soporific. In regard to the shoot of the germinating seed upwards and the root downwards, there must be a directing force or brain power.

THERE is no structure in plants more wonderful than the tip of the root. The course pursued by the root in penetrating the ground is determined by the tip. Darwin wrote: "It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the tip of the radicle, endowed as it is with such diverse kinds of sensitiveness, acts like the brain of animals." It is impossible to witness certain plant organs taking determinate positions and directions, surmounting intervening obstacles, moving spontaneously, or study the manner in which they are affected by stimulants, narcotics or poisons, and yet declare these phenomena to be caused by a different power than that which produces similar actions and effects in animals.

IN an Indian dance the performers are usually arranged in a single or double row or in small groups, and either maintain their positions throughout or vary it by moving slowly around in a circle. The particular movement by which this is accomplished is an alternate stamping of the feet or prancing, which not even the most enthusiastic admirer of things Indian would call graceful. The movement is also invariably accompanied and timed by a chant, sometimes weird, but always monotonous, and the music which often lends its aid is evolved from a drum or by rubbing one stick over another in which notches have been cut, or more commonly, by what boys call a "bull roarer," an instrument consisting of a flat piece of wood to the middle of which a string is attached. By rapidly whirling the wood about the head a loud purring or subdued roaring is produced. This is supposed to have a powerful influence in exorcising evil spirits or in notifying good spirits that attention is desired. In addition to these instruments, the rattle is very much in evidence in many dances and is an important part of the paraphernalia. Rattles are often made of shells of gourds, partly filled with pebbles, sometimes of a frame or circle of wood about half an inch deep, covered with tightly stretched skin and mounted on a suitable handle. In many of the dances additional rattles are used, consisting of turtle-shells bound on the legs of the dancers at the knee and having attached to them a bunch of deer or sheep hoofs, which give out a rhythmic clank as the performers stamp in unison.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

G. H.—Inquire in the trade.

OLD READER.—The son takes the whole.

PHIL.—Consult a respectable medical man.

A. B.—Write to some resident at the town.

C. E. F.—He is not liable if it was accidental.

B. A.—A week's notice appears to be sufficient.

A. L.—You should have been informed before now.

D. F.—Inquire at the office of the paper you mention.

DUFF.—Cannot be altered; but the marriage holds good.

JACK.—We do not answer questions relating to pugilists.

IS DISTRESS.—They must remain, being the landlord's property.

REGULAR READER.—It should be performed by a registrar.

UNHAPPY.—It is no doubt due to increasing years. Let it alone.

CONVANT READER.—Have it registered without further delay.

RALPH.—Children born at sea take the nationality of their parents.

JEMIE.—We should advise much simpler food; too rich food often causes it.

A. K.—It is no longer the fashion to give toasts or sentiments at weddings.

A. B.—Inquire at the Emigrants' Information Office, Broadway, Westminster.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—Obtain the opinion of some dealer; it may have some value.

GERALD.—Take them to some dealer in second-hand books; they are of very little value.

J. K.—No; a marriage with a deceased wife's sister has not yet been legalised in England.

D. M.—If there is no will, the property must be divided equally amongst all the children.

PATRY.—You cannot prevent a daughter of nineteen from choosing her own place of residence.

INDIGNANT.—The employment of dogs for drawing carts was abolished in this country in 1854.

PHIL.—Canada is a British colony, and subject, therefore, to the same sovereign as this country.

DORA.—When fresh, and the stain still wet, rub common salt well into it, and then pour on boiling water.

E. M. B.—If you took the house at a yearly rental you must give six months' notice, ending at the date of entry.

DETERMINED.—We cannot advise you to use force in the case described without previously taking legal advice.

IGNORANT.—A "Creole" is a descendant of white people born in Mexico, South America, and the West Indies.

INTERESTED.—The Drury Lane Theatrical Fund is still in existence. It was instituted by David Garrick in 1793.

QUEBURY.—An apprentice cannot be compelled to serve after he is twenty-one, excepting to make up time lost by his own fault.

DORA.—It is impossible to say without seeing them, or knowing what caused the "dirty marks." Consult a professional cleaner.

DISTRESSED.—We know of no permanent remedy but electrolysis, which is, we believe, a somewhat painful and costly operation.

C. F.—It may be necessary to get the agreement stamped before either party can enforce it. Apply at the Inland Revenue Office.

F. E.—A lady is at liberty to select her own partners on such an occasion from among the gentlemen who ask the favour of dancing with her.

BETTY.—Yes, the same course is to be pursued; if you wish to darken the wood, you can have the French polish stained mahogany colour.

A. G.—It may be benefited by bathing it with tepid water, to which a little bicarbonate of soda has been added. When dry, dust with talcum.

VARE.—There is no fixed rule for the size of the drawings, but it is always an advantage to have them larger than the reproductions required.

A. S.—We strongly advise you to consult a physician without delay. We cannot answer medical questions that are no important as yours seem to be.

M. L.—Eucalyptus oil and productions in which that oil predominates are known to be of greatest advantage, not only for purposes of disinfection, but for cure of bronchial troubles and sores of all descriptions.

OMER.—Take equal proportions of powdered salt and flour, mix and heat in an oven; then thoroughly rub into the fur, which, when cleansed, should be well shaken till all trace of the powder has been got rid of.

OLIVE.—You must take dramatic lessons or practice with an amateur club. No one can give you written instructions enabling you to study for the stage.

GRANT.—There were covered market-crosses in ancient England for the abelard of traders, and they were generally in cities where there were monasteries.

ISQUIRRE.—The lighthouse at Corunna, Spain, is believed to be the oldest one now in use. It was erected during the reign of Trajan, and rebuilt in 1694.

REGULAR SUBSCRIBER.—First decide which company you would prefer to serve, and then ascertain from the secretary or manager what qualifications are required.

BELLA.—Take one part each nitrate of silver with seven parts of cream of tartar; powder and mix; apply to the article by rubbing with slightly wetted flannel cloth.

S. E.—The foreigner must reside in this country for five years, then through the Secretary of State obtain naturalisation papers, which, one way and another, will cost him about £5.

FRANK.—It depends so much on the invitation given by the first gentleman. If he invites the lady to accompany him to the party he should certainly see her home or provide a carriage for her.

GERALD.—Orris root is not poisonous, and is much used in conjunction with a precipitated chalk for a dentifrice on account of its sweet, violet-like scent. It is to be bought at any chemist's.

## A LADY.

Who is a lady? All agree  
It is indeed, not always she  
Whose fingers with rare jewels shine,  
Whose gowns are ultra-fine.  
A lady, with heart fond, kind,  
Will hesitate at length, to find,  
A fault, by etiquette's restraints;  
She will not contradict.

A lady, in discretion wise,  
Bude, awkward question neverplies;  
She will not criticise a friend,  
Nor willingly attend  
To catch the evil gossip's sting  
Abroad on slender's dark-tipped wing;  
To those beneath her socially  
She dears polite to be.

A lady has the greatest care  
To ever shield and gently spare  
The feelings of the lowliest;  
From sting of scorn or jest;  
Unselfishly she plans and strives  
To glad and brighten others' lives;  
Aims high, with cheerful, sunny zest  
To make of things the best.

A lady, by her ease and grace,  
Is known at any time or place;  
In lawn or lace, her taste and tact  
Due courtesy exact.  
Of cultivated roses know  
Less sweetness than the roadside blow;  
The queen may lack civility  
The maid a lady be.

MARION.—Dissolve some ounces of borax (according to size and condition) in hot water; steep the sponges in this till soft, then squeeze out and repeat till cleansed.

MED.—One cup of berries, one half-cup of raisins, chop together, then add one cup of sugar, one teaspoonful of vanilla, one tablespoonful of cold water; bake with two crusts.

VANDA.—Your betrothed has no more right to pay attention to other ladies than you have to receive attention from other gentlemen. In such matters the obligations are equally binding on both parties.

E. W.—We cannot take upon ourselves to advise you where to emigrate to. You should write to the Emigration Bureau, Broadway, Westminster, for the latest pamphlet on emigration, and judge for yourself.

I. E.—If a gentleman cannot make up his mind in six months, he ought to be got rid of as an embarrassment. Long courtships are, in our opinion, by no means necessary preludes to happy marriages.

QUIRIOUS.—"Tommy Atkins" has become the nickname of the British soldier from the fact that the printed forms used in the army have the name "Thomas Atkins" printed to indicate where the user should write his name.

BETTY.—If it is candle grease, blotting paper and a hot iron should remove it. Generally speaking, greasy stains from butter, oil, or fat are best removed with benzine collas, slightly diluted with water and carefully applied.

AUCIA.—Use a quart of milk; mix six spoonfuls of flour with a little of the milk first; add the rest by degrees with a teaspoonful of salt, two of beaten ginger, and two of tincture of saffron. Mix all together quite smoothly, and boil for an hour in a buttered basin.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—Penal servitude for life means, in judicial sentences, detention for twenty years. Penal servitude for the term of a man's natural life means detention until death, and good behaviour ensures no resumption of a portion of the sentence.

AUSTIN.—There are in all 235 islands in the Fijil group. They are in the Pacific Ocean, about 1,100 miles north of New Zealand. They belong now to this country, having been formally ceded in 1874. They are of volcanic origin.

BUST BEE.—Use good starch, make it sufficiently strong, rub it in thoroughly, twist them together to soak well through, iron with a little damp, and put them on dishes before the fire when ironed, that they may harden.

HOUSEWIFE.—Gather the seeds when they are small and green, before the inner kernel has become hard. Remove the stems, and let them stand in salted water over night. Then freshen in cold water, pack in small bottles and cover with boiling vinegar. The vinegar may be speedily if preferred.

HILDA.—We are inclined to think that the young man is merely amusing himself with what he would, doubtless, call a "harmless flirtation." Think no more of him, and if you are obliged to see him occasionally, treat him politely, but only as an ordinary acquaintance.

J. M.—Scientists are not in any doubt whatever about the ability of the deaf and dumb to speak, because, although they cannot hear, they are taught now to use their voices by what is called the "oral" system; they imitate the action of a speaking teacher who stands before them.

MILLY.—As far as grammar and construction are concerned, you could learn French perfectly well from a book, but for conversational purposes it is infinitely wiser to get someone to give you instruction. It is impossible to get the correct pronunciation without having practical teaching.

IN DOUBT.—It would be a foolish and romantic principle to marry with any doubts of happiness, and, under the circumstance, the best thing for "Annie" to do is to write to the gentleman, stating that she has altered her mind, and declines any personal interview. If he be a gentleman that will suffice.

L. T.—If you cannot write without lines, to keep your words from a slip-slop course slip in between the folds of your paper a heavily ruled sheet, which will be a guide until practice enables you to control your hand so that you can keep your writing straight and even without an outside help.

MARION.—True friendship is not affected by change of fortune. The gentleman friend who meets you with the same polite greeting now that you are poor, only shows his worthiness of your confidence, and you would unjustly rob yourself of a pleasure in refusing to speak when you meet him in the street.

H. R.—Perth was the actual capital of Scotland down till 1483, in the reign of James II., and fourteen. Parliaments are said to have been held in it between 1200 and 1450; but, as a matter of fact, the place was rather a sort of harbour of refuge for royalty and the executive than the recognised capital, which Edinburgh was from the earliest date.

FLO.—Coarse red hands may be whitened by using a few grains of chloride of lime added to warm soft water for washing. All rings must be removed before this is used, as the chloride of lime will tarnish them. In using chloride of lime it is very important to avoid getting any of the powder into the eyes, as it is exceedingly irritating, and may even cause blindness.

DOUBTFUL.—It depends upon circumstances; unless you were the guest of the gentleman in any way, you would certainly defray your own expenses. If, however, it were a matter of invitation, and the gentleman were escorting you to the place of amusement, then he would settle all accounts, and for you to offer to bear a share of the expenses would merely be to insult him.

POPPY.—A good use for old ribbons is to work them into the cover of a sofa pillow in crazy work style. The smallest bits may be worked in, and a very rich effect obtained if the colours are well assorted; both sides of the cushion are to be done in crazy work. It makes a very serviceable cover, and is specially useful as a head-rest. Finish the edge with a frill of silk. This style of work is very popular now.

R. L.—The term "negro" is not applied to a single nation, and, therefore, is not synonymous with African, but denotes the ideal type constituted by the assemblage of certain physical characteristics which is exemplified in the natives of Guinea, in Western Africa, and in their descendants in America and the West Indies, whither they were originally carried, chiefly as slaves. The origin of the race is one of the undecided points of ethnological science.

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## INSIDE AND OUTSIDE.

It is the fellow who stands inside the house and looks out through the window that most enjoys the storm. How jolly to see the passers-by struggling against the wind or scudding before it, their coat collars up to their ears, their hats jammed down on their heads, slapping and slashing over the flooded pavements, soaked to the skin, maybe, cursing the weather with what breath they may have left, as they pelt and writhe along the road. Great fun, I say, this is for the man who looks out through the window. Not his are the wet clothes "clinging like cerements," as poor Tom Hood said about the girl who had ended her sorrows, as so many do, in the Thames. Not his the able-bodied chance of catching a bad cold and getting floored with rheumatism or pneumonia. Oh, no; he is on the right side of the brick wall, snug as a bug in a rug, and dry as a bone. So he just fills himself full up with what is probably one of the meanest forms of delight, the enjoyment of witnessing the miseries of others. You may not believe it, but I know people who take a distinct and positive pleasure in attending funerals for the sake of looking upon the grief of the afflicted and hugging the idea that it is somebody else and not they themselves who is being macerated and ground up in the merciless mill of sorrow.

On the same lines we may regard strong, healthy persons; they who have been hearty as pigs all their lives; they who eat like hungry horses and sleep like policemen off duty; who have scarce ever had a pang or a pain, and fancy that illness in others is a culpable weakness, if not an absolute sin. I have a notion to add that chronically well people are the coldest blooded wretches on earth. There! I *have* said it, and it's true. If the reader is one of them, he can skip the following letter if he likes. There are plenty more to whom it will be an advantage to peruse it carefully.

"For over ten years," says the writer, "I had suffered from indigestion and weakness. I felt weak, low, and heavy. I had no appetite, and when I sat down to the table, often I could not touch a morsel of food. After meals I had excruciating pain at the chest, through to the back: also a gnawing constant pain under the shoulder blade. I had frequent bilious attacks, being so sick that I could not lift my head from the pillow.

"At night I was restless, getting no proper sleep, and in the morning feeling worse tired than when I went to bed. I was much swollen about the waist, and was constantly belching wind. I got gradually weaker and weaker, it being a misery to get about. I continued like this for ten years, never being well, and not knowing what it was to enjoy my meals. I saw doctor after doctor (I am sure that I consulted twenty doctors), who gave me medicines, but I received no benefit from them. They did not suit my case.

"I gave up all hope of ever getting well again and wished that I was dead, always fretting at my weak state. In April of last year (1896) a pamphlet was sent me by post, and I read about Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. My symptoms were accurately described in this small book, and I determined to try it.

"I sent to Mr. Coppin's Stores, Marsham Street, Westminster, for a bottle of this medicine. After taking it a few days I found it was doing me good. I could eat and enjoy my food, which agreed with me. This gave me confidence, and I continued with it, and soon all the pain left me, I felt as strong and well as ever I did in my life. I felt brighter, and could eat anything, nothing coming amiss. I have since kept in good health, taking an occasional dose when required. You can make what use you like of this statement, and refer anyone to me. (Signed) (Mrs.) Annie White, 117, High Road, New Southgate, London, N., August 10th, 1897."

This lady is the wife of Mr. H. White, butcher, New Southgate. In private conversation they both speak very enthusiastically of Mother Seigel's Syrup. Mrs. White says that although during her long illness she could scarcely walk at all, she can now walk six miles without fatigue. And that is not half a bad tramp, even for a woman who has never been ill. Many of them cannot do as much. That our correspondent *can* is a striking illustration of the power of the medicine that cured her. I who write these lines have not always had the luck to be looking out of the window at other people fighting the bad weather. I have been bowed down under the tempest of sickness and pain myself. And so have millions. And it is *we* who sympathise with Mrs. White and rejoice with her on her recovery.

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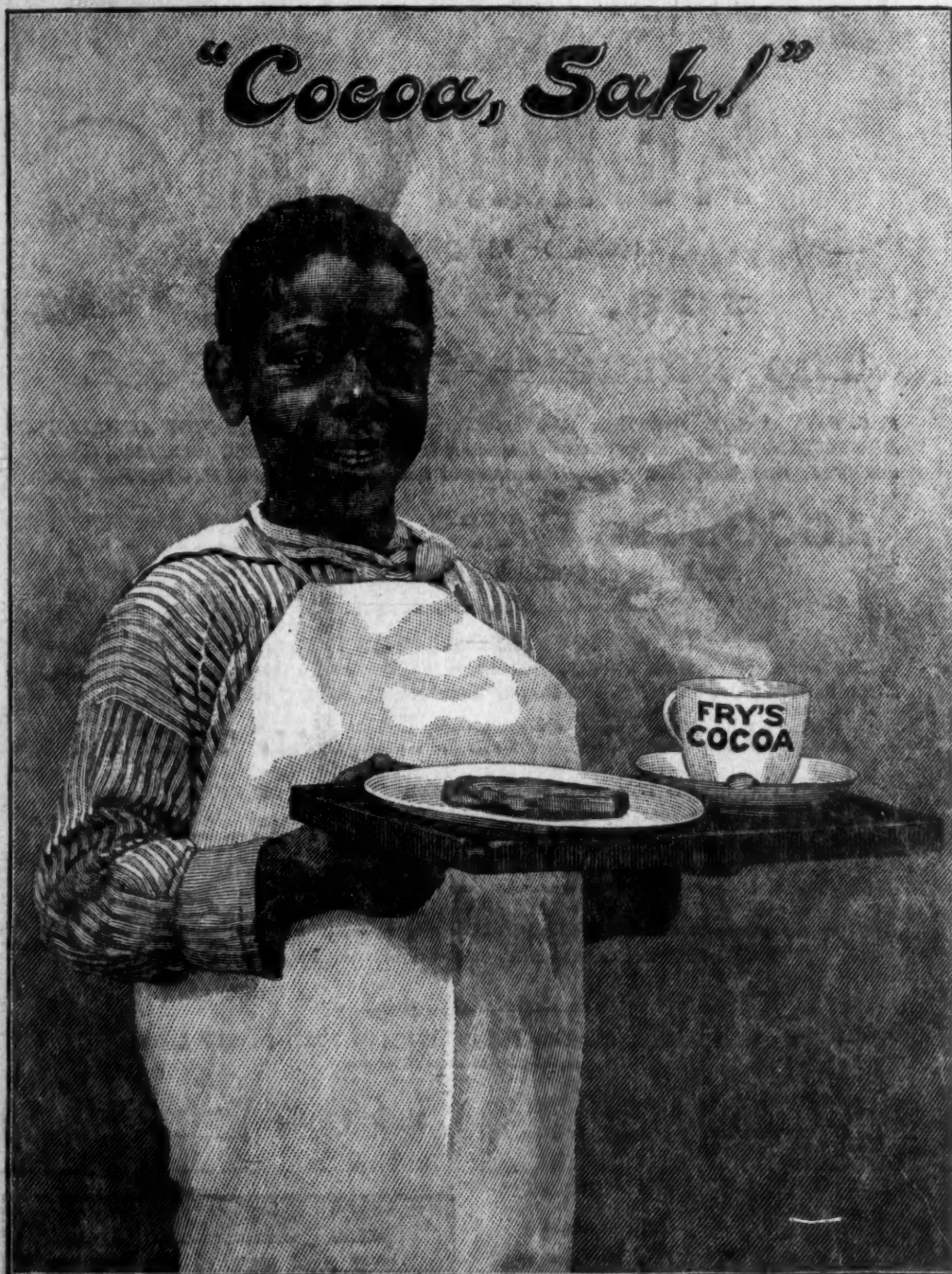
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**CONTENTS.**

**NOVELETTES.**

	PAGE
A MISJUDGED WIFE ... ..	361 385
THE EVIDENCE OF A RING ... ..	409
A FATAL INHERITANCE ... ..	433

**SHORT STORIES.**

A WIND OF FATE ... ..	367
WHEN SUMMER CAME ... ..	391
BARBARA MORELAND'S CHOICE ... ..	416
THE TRUE TEST ... ..	425

**SERIAL STORIES.**

	PAGE
MY SWEETHEART ... ..	368, 393 413, 441
BROWN AS A BERRY ... ..	373 397, 421 445
WHAT LIES BEYOND! ... ..	379, 402, 426 450

**VARIETIES.**

POETRY ... ..	333, 407 431 455
FACE-TO-FACE ... ..	381, 405, 429, 453
SOCIETY ... ..	382, 406 430, 454
STATISTICS ... ..	382, 406, 430, 454
GEMS ... ..	382 406 430, 454
HOUSEHOLD TREASURES ... ..	382 406, 430 454
MISCELLANEOUS ... ..	382, 406, 430, 454
NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS ... ..	383, 407 431, 455

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